EDITION

MATT TAIBBI'S NEOCON NIGHTMARE

TAMING THE FCC

#72

ADBUSTERS

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WAR IS A FORCE THAT GIVES US MEANING

CHRIS HEDGES

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THIS IS HOW IT ALL BEGINS...

Hell

separation anxiety

me

The quest for an authentic life



One glorious day, a girl sat down to write. Her mind was blank with only hazy thoughts. Her life was a joke, full of bullshit and filth. She was dirty in a dirty place. Who cares about her anyways? The room was empty, devoid of any furniture or sign of life, besides the empty pizza boxes scattered around the room. Her life was trash, just like the room. Pain was her only true companion. Tears filled her eyes as she stared down at the blank paper. The colored lines began to blur from the salty water. She sat still, wallowing in the depths of her infinite sorrow.

– *Kim Shoemaker*



UPI PHOTO/HO/NBC NEWS

On April 16, 2007, Seung-Hui Cho gunned down 32 people at Virginia Tech University in the worst school shooting ever in the United States.



REUTERS

On March 7, 2007, the US Marine Corps fired hundreds of bullets in the Ningarhar Province, Afghanistan, killing ten civilians.





I took a walk today, oh boy...

LAURA RUSSELL


IT THE
ICKEN
ORE THE
EGG


HUB



REUTERS/JIM YOUNG

When John Edwards talked about the two Americas, I knew exactly what he meant. I live in a trailer park in Wisconsin. I have three part-time jobs. When I heard that he spent $400 on a haircut, I realized that he's not like the rest of us after all. That would be three months groceries for me right there. Go back to your other America, Edwards. I have no idea why I even voted for you.
– *Jim Norton*



They say that they are tough, gangsters, are in a gang that will back them up for anything. They say that they are O.G.'s that will kill you. They say that they are the toughest, "baddest homies" and that they will kick your @$$ if you mess with them. They are rappers. But if they are so tough and will do all of the things they say they will do, then why do they have bomb-proof Hummers? If they say that they will put you six feet under if you mess with them, then why do they have ten bodyguards that stop anyone from getting near them? Yeah, sure, someone could shoot them. But they claim that they shoot people and are around that kind of stuff all the time. So what are they so afraid of? I guess I'm a hypocrite because I listen to rap, but in my eyes they are some of the most inauthentic people in show biz.
– *Marty Milne*



DENNIS VAN TINE/ABACAUSA

When I saw *An Inconvenient Truth*, I thought, cool, Al Gore is really trying to fix our disaster, even if it is too late. When I heard about Gore's 10,000-square-foot house, though, my mind stamped *Inconvenient Hypocrite* all over him. How can one whole-heartedly be a part of their cause if they aren't truthful to its origins? I mean, come on, if you can come to Calgary and bash on about how bad our oil-fields are to the environment, yet you have a furnace that takes an oil-field to run, that doesn't come anywhere close to authentic to me.
– *Logan Stein*

Authenticity is
Found in the ironic laugh
Dripping from Al Gore's patented shoes
Leaking from the diesel tank of David Suzuki's bus
Oozing from Edward Burtynsky's photography equipment as he snaps shot after shot of our manufactured landscape.

Authenticity is
Found in the salty tear
Dripping from a Chinese worker's eye as she sews together Al Gore's shoes
Leaking from the pores of Bangladesh laborers, shipping off diesel for Suzuki's bus
Oozing from a hungry African girl, crouched in a diamond field, watching Burtynsky eat a sandwich and photograph her landscape.

Authenticity is the silence that falls on a casket after the final eulogy has been spoken.

It's a child's gasp of horror, wonder or surprise as the world unfolds its mysteries, one gasp after another.

It's the two coins donated by a woman on welfare, versus the piles of bills offered by the rich.

It's the quiet heartbeat of humanity being dulled by
layer upon layer of fast food and greed.

It's the groan of creation watching itself be stripped bare, unable to be heard.

Authenticity is a word whose definition we no longer understand.

-Emily Wierenga

The Bored Series
Zoe Jet Ellis



being authentic is the only sure way to avoid mood disorders



JERRY SPAGNOLI



Is this voice in the back of my mind fooling me? Am I really a unique human being with my own body, mind and soul, on my own magic journey through life? Or is this feeling of separateness an illusion, the source of all my anxiety and angst?



Sometimes I'm afraid that when I grow up, I'll make a habit of pretending to be other people. That's the charm of twenty-first century living, isn't it? Let's play make-believe! I'll make up life stories for entirely fictional characters, with fictional friends and fictional accents and fictional personalities. I'll write books about these individuals and act each one out in real life to figure out precisely how people might react. I'll make charts and record, revise, rescript and edit. I'll dress up and play the part, with hair and makeup and eccentric charm every night; it will all just be a mildly interesting pastime.

. . . like people watching.

But with lying and acting and treating people like lab rats, too.

– *Alex Gill*



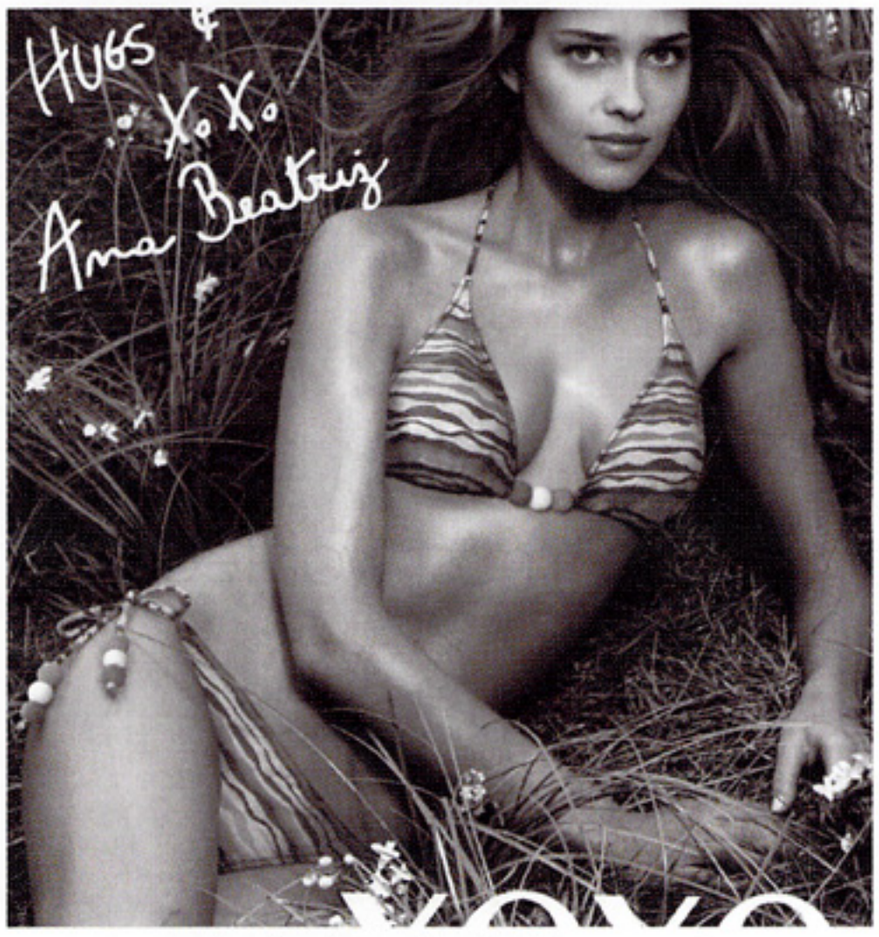
RYAN CLARK



Eating fast food at McDonald's



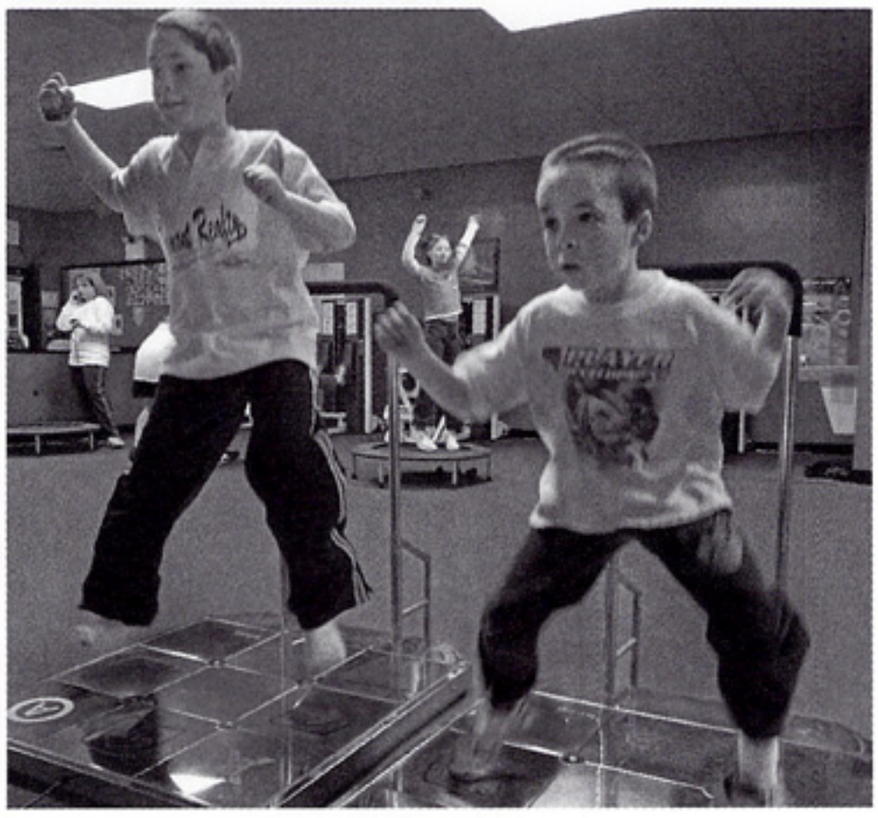
Learning to cook



An advertisement from TeenVogue



A teen with confidence and self-esteem

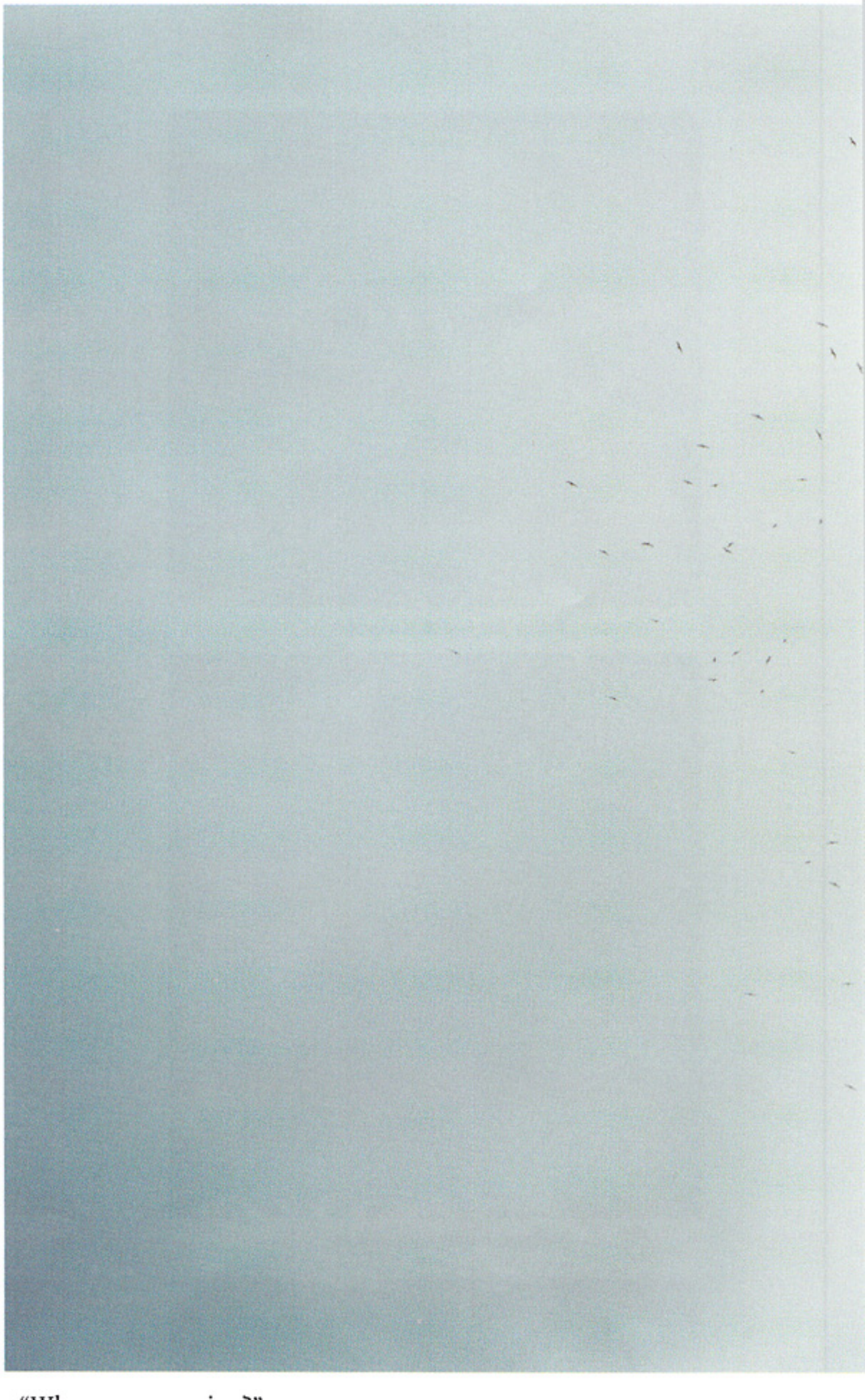


Dance Dance Revolution in gym class



Team sports outdoors

FEAR OF FALLING



It was May. Donat Bobet and I strolled across the Parc Jeanne-Mance among the university students with book bags on their shoulders, the young mothers pushing strollers, the office workers like me enjoying a midday respite. I saw a man selling ice cream out of a little cart. "Would you care for an ice cream, Donat?"

"I adore ice cream!" he said. "Lamentably, I find that I cannot eat it on an empty stomach." He rubbed his belly.

Though I had eaten lunch before joining him, I led him to a café where he ordered a sandwich, a salad, and a beer. I paid the bill even before he was obliged to examine his wallet and find it, sadly, empty. We returned to the park. I bought an ice cream for each of us.

"Thank you," said the poet.

"Well," I told him, "I must maintain my reputation as a faithful patron of the arts."

"Patron of the arts," he repeated, making it sound almost like a question. "Patron of the arts." He turned suddenly on the path. "And how is it," he said in an accusatory tone, "that I have never seen you attempt poetry yourself?"

I thought his manner was rather aggressive, especially toward a friend who had just bought him lunch, a friend who had bought him the ice cream that he now shook in my face.

He said, in the manner of an inquisitor, "Have you written poems, yet not shown them to me?"

"My friend," I said. I gestured helplessly with my own ice cream. "I have shown you no poems because there are none to show. I am no poet, Donat. I haven't the aptitude."

He scowled and turned away. I hurried along behind. The poet now ate his ice cream in great bites, as if the confection were the object of his disdain. When he had finished, he still marched through the park without looking back at me. Finally, he turned from the path and started across the grass.

"Where are we going?"

Donat stopped in the middle of a grassy expanse. He lay on his back, stretching his hands out to either side. "Come," he said. "Lie down."

I finished my ice cream, then wiped my fingers with my handkerchief. "Is the ground quite dry?" I said. "I have to return to work soon."

"Patron of the arts," Donat said. "Patron of the arts." Then he said, "Monsieur, it is one thing to buy a poet an ice cream. But you will not risk dampness to your business clothes for the sake of art?"

I felt the grass with my hands. I do not know what I would have done if I had concluded that it was too damp. However, the lawn posed no danger to my clothes. I lay down on my back.

"Arms out," Donat said. "Hold onto the grass."



"Storm"
Sonoma, 2005
Ari Marcopolous

I did as he commanded.

"When I was a boy," Donat said, "I was afraid of falling into the sky. And you? Were you ever afraid of falling into the sky?"

I made no reply. The idea was absurd. No one falls into the sky, and surely even as a child I had sense enough not to fear such a thing.

"Look up," said Donat.

Lying on my back, there was really nowhere to look but up. Little fat clouds wandered the springtime sky.

"What is gravity, the force that holds you to the earth? A mystery, no? Can you rely on it, this mysterious force?"

"I do rely on it, Donat."

"Close your eyes, Monsieur. Close your eyes."

I closed them.

"Consider what it would be like to fall into the sky. All that blue space. The distances between the clouds. A man falling into the sky might fall forever!"

I felt ridiculous. I began to wonder who might be watching us.

"When I was a child," said Donat Bobet, "I would lie in the grass and imagine myself falling up, up, up into the blue. Into the blue depths of the sky. Into the blue."

"Donat . . ." I said.

"Hush," said the poet. He said nothing for the space of a few heartbeats. "Get ready," he whispered. "Open your eyes!"

When I opened my eyes, I saw above me the blue sky, the little clouds. I saw Donat Bobet, on his knees, watching me.

"The sky," said Donat. "Falling into the sky!"

I examined the airy deep. I considered the clouds. I considered, not very seriously, the absurd idea of falling up.

Suddenly, my stomach turned, as it does when an elevator descends. I felt the earth lose its grip. I clutched the grass in my fists. Clenched my jaw.

I was dizzy. I tore the grass free in my fists. My head spun.

I turned onto my side to regain my equilibrium. No good. My stomach still twisted.

I sat up.

The world righted itself.

Donat Bobet was laughing. He pulled me to my feet and embraced me. He shook with laughter. "Your face!" he said. "Oh, the terror in your eyes! The terror!"

He kissed me on each cheek. He embraced me again.

I still felt a little dizzy.

The poet took a step back. He made his face stern. "Never!" he said, pointing like an offended schoolmaster at my chest, "Never again say that you have no aptitude for poetry!"

– *Bruce Holland Rogers*



The era in which we live is described by Heidegger as the "Epoch of the Object."

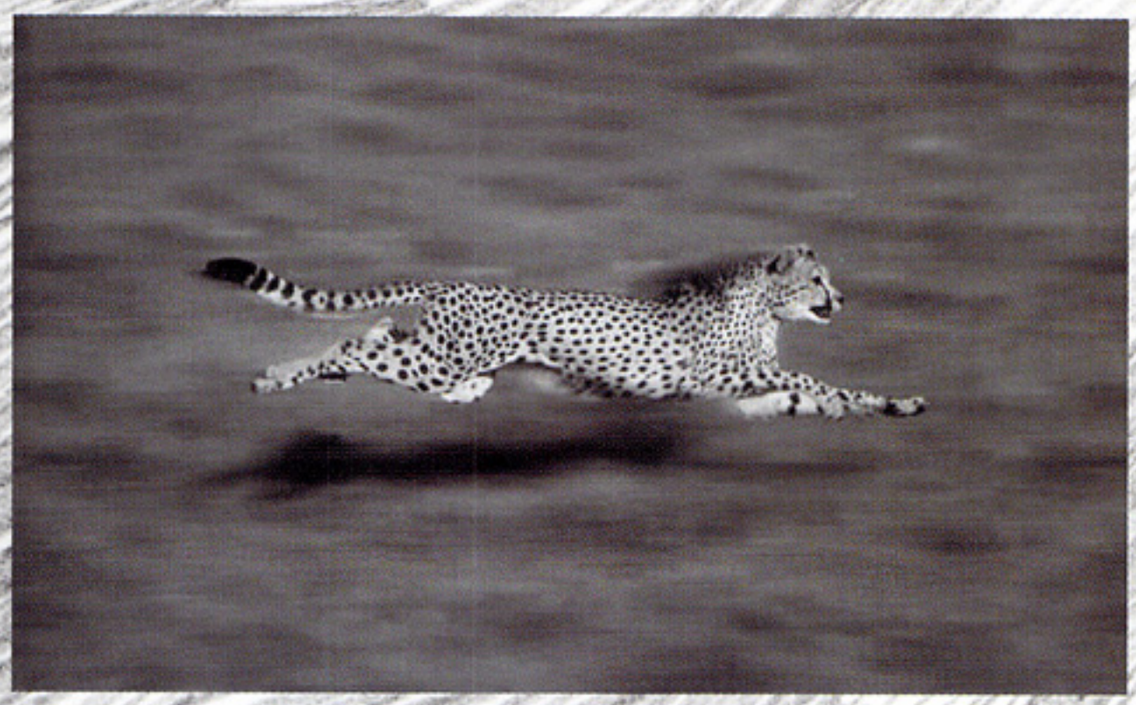
This means that all beings (plants, animals, humans, gods, ideas, values) are taken as only objects. This is a flattening that explains the utter emptiness and desolation of our world.

The epoch of the object denies us access to Being (the source of all beings). We no longer question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" because we believe all beings are "made" by technology.

The epoch of the object also means that all thought has become "conceptual." Concepts are treated as objects therefore all conceptual thought is grounded in the object.

– *Micah White*

NATALIE BELDING



A cheetah in the glory of its life

This is how it begins:
a few people start
breaking their old
patterns, embracing
what they love
(and in the process
discovering what they
hate), daydreaming,
questioning,
rebelling. The only
thing missing is a
perceptual shift – a
tantalizing glimpse of
a new way of being –
that suddenly brings
everything into focus.




being
nothingness
PRADA

WE'RE IN THE ENDGAME NOW

American pundit Thomas Friedman wrote in the *New York Times* recently: "We don't just need the first black president, we need the first green president. We don't just need the first woman president, we need the first environmental president. We don't just need a president who has been toughened by years as a prisoner of war but a president who is tough enough to level with the American people about the profound economic, geopolitical and climate threats posed by our addiction to oil – and to offer a real plan to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels." He then went on to say: "I am not proposing that we radically alter our lifestyles. We are who we are – including a car culture."

That pretty well sums up the way most of us in the affluent West feel about global warming: we're ready to make small sacrifices, change our light bulbs, our cars and even our leaders, but our culture – the American way of life – is not negotiable.

That's too bad, because our consumer culture is the primary cause of our ecological crisis. Since WWII, our consumption levels have grown by 300 percent and in the process we've developed enormous footprints, insatiable appetites and a boundless sense of entitlement. There's something degenerate now at the very heart of our culture, and fixing it won't be easy. We'll have to confront the fact that we do not have the right to emit carbon into the atmosphere at a much higher rate than everyone else on Earth. And then we'll have to rethink many aspects of our lives: the way we eat, work, get around, shop, entertain ourselves, raise our children and think about freedom and the responsibilities that come with it.

That kind of cultural transformation will be pretty hard to pull off and it may take more apocalyptic eco-news, more Virginia Techs, kids on Ritalin, more military strikes and terrorists who hate us and maybe a global economic crash before we get serious.

But there's also an upside to all this: we're in the endgame now – all six-and-a-half billion of us living through one of the wildest, most lunatic moments in human history, working our way towards an enthralling collective climax. Will it be a dog-eat-dog bloodbath, or a more erotic, consensual kind of climax in which we work it out together? For awhile longer, the choice remains ours.

for the wild, Kalle

PS: Upcoming issue: How To Create a Carbon Neutral Culture.
Send your stories, art works and campaign ideas to: editor@adbusters.org.

this issue is about disconnecting and reconnecting

psycho



the arousal industry

girls against marketing

networking fever

the anglosphere media crunch

eco



reconnecting with food

the trouble with rubbish

acts of ecological warfare

business as usual



authentic business

nike vendetta

the blackspot café

politico



drowning in phony

back from the neocon graveyard

the death mask of war

cultural psychosis

anarcho

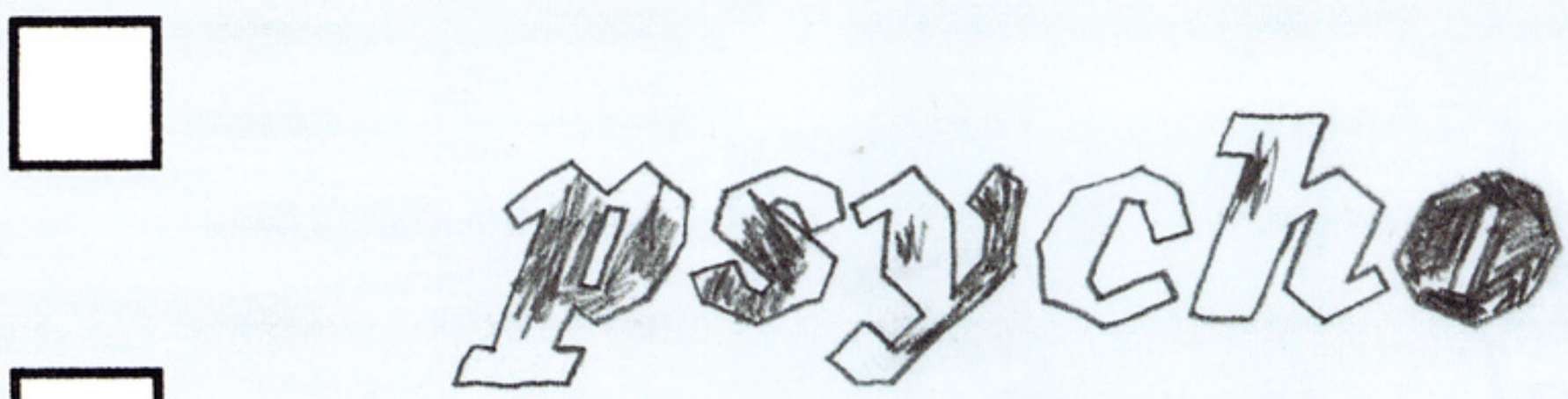


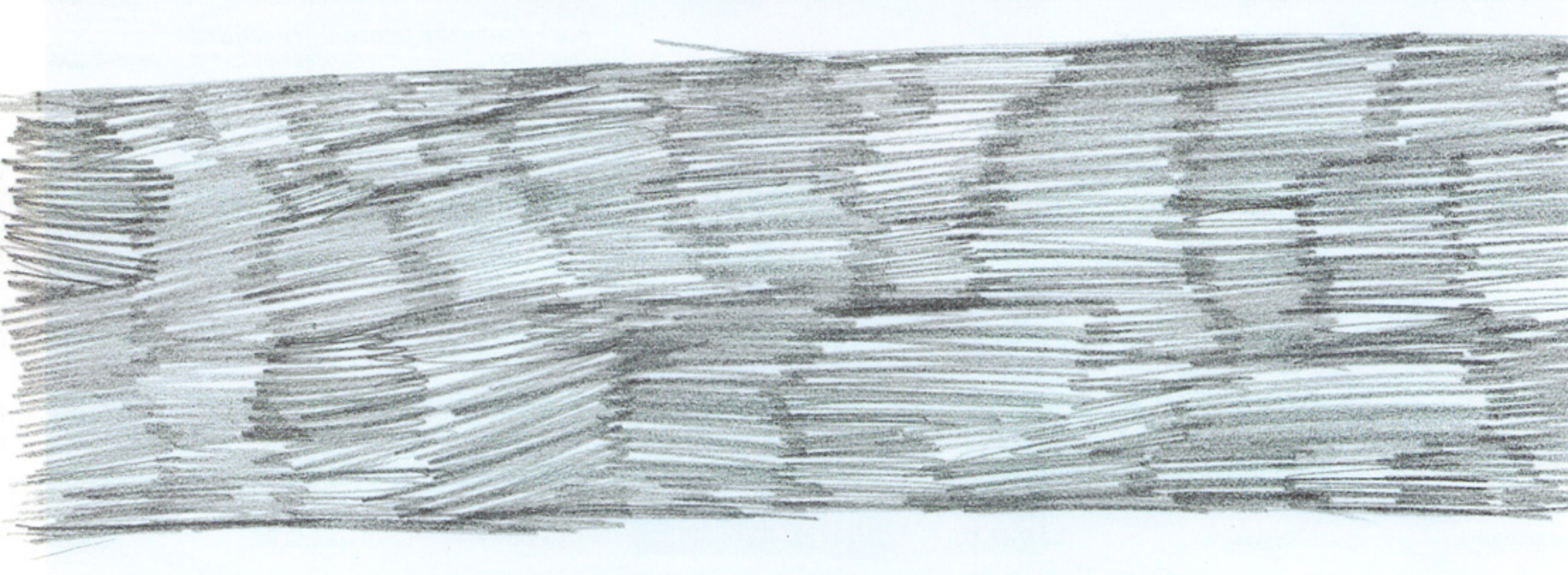
jazz and jihad

spiritually ablaze

one last fight before you die




psycho





When I commented on Allison's T-shirt, she willingly showed me what she had done to herself only hours earlier – taken a razor and incised the word "EMPTY" into her forearm. Allison's "EMPTY" helped crystallize my thoughts about what exactly I had been seeing in my office for the past several years – kids who for all the world looked fine on the outside, but were bleeding underneath.

Kids who looked like they had everything, but in fact had none of the things that are necessary to anchor a healthy sense of self: a sense of authenticity, of purpose, of being loved for who they are and not simply how they perform. For Allison, as for many of my young patients, the devlopment of a sense of self was stalled.

– *Madeleine Levine, from Tikkun (Jan/Feb 2007)*

The Woman Who Never Went Out

What happened when she realized there was more in the world than the view from her kitchen window



IT HURT—that sudden flash of seeing herself as others must see her. A drudge—that's what she was. One of the army of women past whom the world whirls gaily, while they grow older and more faded and colorless—till finally one morning they wake up and realize that their chance to play has slipped away forever.

She had never meant to let it happen—it had come upon her so gradually she couldn't remember how it began.

When first she was married she went out quite often—to little tea parties, to luncheons, and to "showers" given for her friends when they were married, too. And in the evening she would go to the movies with her husband and they'd stop in at the Greek's for a sundae on the way home, quite as they had done when they were engaged.

But before she knew it her friends stopped inviting her—she was always "too tired," or didn't have time. And now, as she stood among her pots and pans, it seemed to her that that was all she ever did. Was it really months since she had been to a party—or did it only seem so? Oh, how she hated that kitchen—even the view from the window was always the same!

* * *

What should she do? It was inconceivable that she should simply walk out and let the door close behind her, as Nora did in The Doll's House. No such dramatic solution was needed, anyway. It was a matter for sane thought, for constructive effort—

So she sat down to think it over calmly.



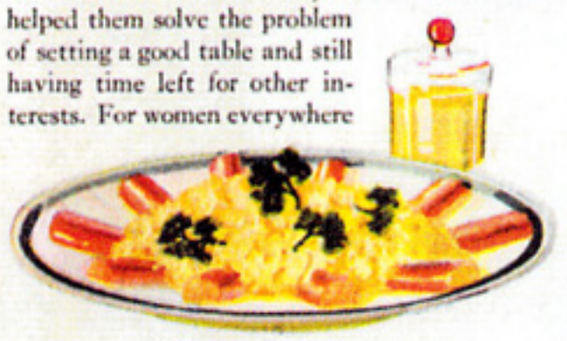
Corned Beef Metropolitan

Cream Libby's Corned Beef and place on platter. Dot with sliced ripe olives and garnish with toast points and hard boiled egg slices. Quickly prepared and delightful to eat!

In the end, as she wrote us in one of the most interesting letters we have ever received, it simmered down to the conclusion that she had let her job run away with her. She saw that she had allowed her housekeeping to absorb not only all her time but her interest and vivacity. And she resolved to turn over a new leaf—to start at once to get the upper hand of her job—to run her house, instead of letting her house run her!

As soon as she really tried, her letter said, she discovered countless ways to relieve the burden of her housekeeping "chores." It would take too long to describe all of them, but one which she stumbled on may prove helpful to you, too. She began to use Libby's Packaged Meats.

This woman is only one of many who have told us how these almost-ready-to-serve meats have helped them solve the problem of setting a good table and still having time left for other interests. For women everywhere



Just right when they're hungry—Vienna Sausage and eggs

Heat and split Libby's Vienna Sausages and arrange on plate with mound of scrambled eggs. Such tender, savory little sausages you never tasted!

are learning that there are no finer meats obtainable than Libby's Packaged Meats—Corned Beef, Dried Beef, Vienna Sausage, Veal Loaf and a long list of other delicacies.

They are packaged in Chicago—meat center of the world—where the choicest meats are available to the Libby kitchens. Only cuts from fresh Government inspected meats are used.

They come to you in air-tight containers which, when opened, reveal the meats as fresh as on the day they were packed. You will find that Libby's meats have a flavor and tenderness that home cooking of ordinary meats cannot approach. Shown on this page are a few suggestions for new



Dried Beef with rice and tomato sauce—try it!

Boil one cup rice until tender in salted boiling water, drain dry and moisten with tomato sauce. Serve with Libby's Dried Beef, creamed and garnished with parsley

and delightful ways of serving these meats. Begin tomorrow to let Libby's meats save time for you.

"Book of Five Minute Meats"—Free

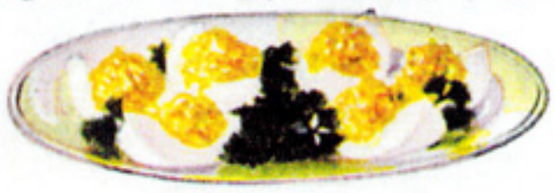
WRITE for the Libby "Book of Five Minute Meats," a book of simple recipes devised by Libby's expert chefs to lighten the burden of cooking and save time for the homemaker. Every dish is attractively illustrated in full colors and is accompanied by complete cooking instructions. Write for your copy today. It is Free.

Your grocer has Libby's Packaged Meats or will gladly get them for you.

LIBBY'S MUSTARD—Try Libby's Mustard with Libby's meats. An unusually good mustard—not too "tangy," not too mild, delightful in flavor, it adds a touch of savoriness that puts an edge on the dullest appetite.

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Libby, McNeill & Libby of Can., Ltd., 45 E. Front St., Toronto, Ont., Can.

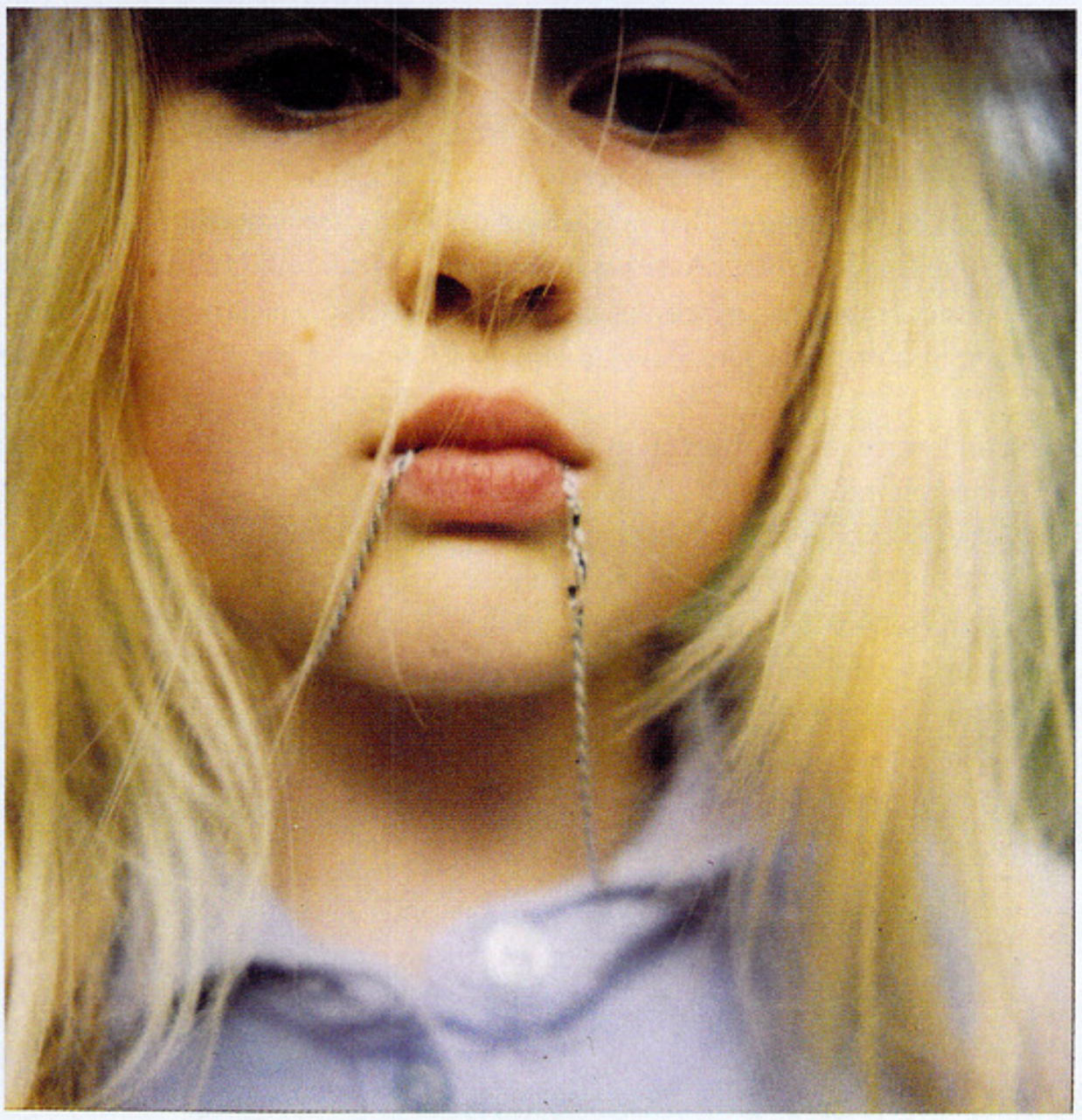




The best deviled eggs you ever ate—stuffed with veal

Remove yolks from hard boiled eggs which have been cut in quarters. Mash yolks with Libby's Veal Loaf and arrange mixture on egg quarters. Garnish with parsley

HOT TOTS



They call them "Hot Tots" – young, prepubescent girls who wear skimpy clothing, mounds of makeup and appear years older than their actual age. Their creation is a marketer's dream come true, but a nightmare for any developing young woman.

The American Psychological Association (APA) recently released a damning report earlier this year that found the sexualization of young girls in media, advertising and society are beginning to cause serious emotional and mental breakdowns.

From female pop stars flashing their genitals in public to thongs for seven-year-olds with messages on them such as "eye candy," young girls are under a constant assault of sexual imagery. When Abercrombie & Fitch launched its infamous kiddie thong collection in 2002, it asserted that girls as young as ten "are style-conscious and want underwear that doesn't produce a visible panty line." Clothing and toy manufacturers that push over-sexed products on young girls such as bralettes and Bratz dolls are reaping huge profits despite the massive social costs.

The APA report asks, "How does a seven-year-old understand the plastic sexuality of Britney Spears? How do ten-year-olds cope with pressure to dress and act in sexually provocative ways?" The answer is they can't.

In fact, the pressure to be skinny, wear revealing clothing and be more flirtatious has been incredibly damaging. APA researchers found the increasing objectification of young girls is undermining their confidence and comfort with their own body and replacing it with feelings of shame and anxiety. In 2006, as part of their Campaign for Real Beauty, Dove released a study that found the vast majority of 15-17-year-olds around the world don't feel beautiful and want to change some aspect of their body (primarily body weight). This increasing sexualization is also linked with three of the most common mental and physical health problems diagnosed in girls and women: eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression.

Whether it's the hourglass figure or the bone-rack body, young women have always had to compare themselves to subservient and unhealthy physical stereotypes created by men. But where girls could once look to their mothers for guidance and inspiration, women are increasingly following the reverse trend and adapting the styles and persona of young women. With the advent of the "Yummy Mummy," marketers have created a disturbing ideal for both mothers and daughters that leave girls with less chance to escape their objectification.

The consequences are frightening and researchers note that, aside from turning back the clock on female empowerment, the cult of the Lolita is affecting women's sexual development, opening doors to abuse and trafficking, and creating a harmful impact on young women, their relationships and society.

– Sean Condon

SAVANNAH ROSE TOCKIN

psycho **sexual news**

We're at that bar again. The same bar as always. I work all week and then come here to connect. Here, where the drinks are cheap, I see that girl.

You know that girl, she knows everyone here. I know everyone here, too. We hug. We talk about our time alone. That time where we found each other under clear bright lights, where we didn't have to yell to be heard. We discuss those conversations we had, the ones that would drag deep into the night and leave us whispering under the covers.

But here, now, in the dark and noise, our conversation is sidetracked. She looks over my shoulder intermittently as if for something better. Impatience. We can't get profound here. Big thoughts, big emotions, hang incomplete in the air and she moves past me to hug another two minute conversation.

Alone again, I nod to a passerby. He comes over and we converse. I say, "You ever just want to talk about something genuine without feeling like a creep?"

He leans his ear over toward my mouth and says, "What?"

And I wave to someone else, resigned to go broad and not deep.

Joel Janisse

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

Millions of Americans turn to online dating sites as a solution to loneliness. Many end up finding that the alluring banner ads and perfectly chiseled (photoshopped) bodies create false hope, an illusion. One thing that is most definitely not an illusion, however, is the brutal sub-culture spawned from the multitude of dating services.

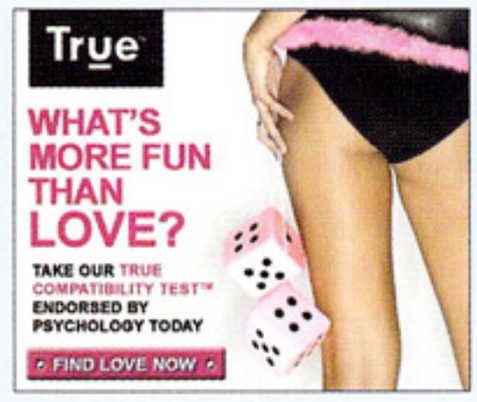
They're called serial daters. You may have met one without even knowing it. They start by creating a form email, leaving blank areas for personalization later. Then they quickly customize each letter by adding a name, and a short sentence or two related to something said in the recipient's profile, and voila! Send it out to a few hundred prospects over the course of an hour or two, and watch all the emails come in from those who are interested (and somewhat misled).

Is something lost when one turns the search for love into such a mechanical process? If your answer isn't an unquestionable yes, then maybe you need to take a look in the mirror. Internet dating is an obsession in this culture, one that often breeds unrealistic expectations, watered-down, by-the-numbers love affairs, and the type of indecision that comes along with semi-automated temptation.

Josh Edelson

Los Angeles, California, USA





True Love

"It's nice to be naughty," claims the buxom hotty in a certain widely disseminated ad for True.com, one of online dating's biggest players. It's the sort of oxymoronic sentiment that encapsulates, at least in spirit, the seemingly two-faced practices of a company that has been raising the hackles of its competitors in an industry struggling with stagnant revenues.

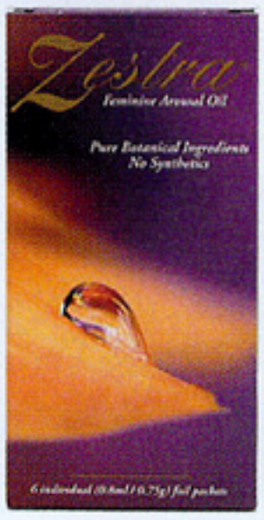
As the name would suggest, True strives to distinguish itself as the lone bastion for honest and safe dating in an online world full of liars and cheaters – "dedicated to maintaining an ethical environment for serious singles to meet," as their marketing copy puts it. To that end, it conducts background checks on new members to ensure that they are neither married nor felons. It has also been a key mover behind efforts to get US state legislatures to compel social networking sites to declare whether or not they perform similar checks.

At first glance, this sounds noble enough. Competitors like Match.com and Yahoo Personals, however, have been lobbying against the proposal on the grounds that the background checks are ineffective and create a false sense of security, since it is too easy to provide false personal information when signing up. Since True is the only major service that runs the checks, they are the only party that stands to gain from any such legislation.

Moreover, True's incongruously sexual ad campaigns – one web banner offers a pair of generous jugs accompanied by the caption "dive into love" – has drawn extensive popular criticism, particularly among users of MySpace, where the ads are common. Members of True have also voiced their dismay with the company's policy of automatically generating "winks" – the industry jargon for messages of interest between members – that appear to come from a prospective date, but that are actually sent without that user's knowledge.

The founder of True, Herb Vest, recently defended the fake winks to a *New York Times* reporter. "We try getting people who otherwise might be very retiring or shy to meet each other and fall in love and have children," he argued. "We are just trying to do our job as a matchmaker."

C.D.



Female Arousal

With all of the extravagant efforts to debut a "Women's Viagra" currently caught in approval limbo, consumer-product conglomerates like Johnson & Johnson have stepped up to promise on-demand female arousal in the form of newfangled personal lubricants.

The company's venerable K-Y brand has enjoyed a four-fold increase in sales over in the last three years, in large part on the strength of its Warming Liquid, which delivers the sensation of heat when applied to the genitals of either sex. J&J's competitors have offered up scores of similar warming products – along with a more recent array of mint-based "tingling" lubricants – all of which depend on mild tissue irritation to achieve their curious effects.

Seeking to differentiate itself in this newly crowded market, one upstart US company is making a slippery splash with a $10 million ad campaign for Zestra Female Arousal Fluid. First made available to the public in 2005, the oil is made from botanical oils and extracts that Zestra Laboratories claims can "naturally stimulate the body's own sensory nerve conduction," rather than merely irritating the genitals.

Although Zestra is not a drug and thus does not require clinical research trials, one double-blind trial published in 2003 in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* did indeed find that Zestra fared better at arousing women than a placebo oil.

That should go a long way in guaranteeing Zestra Laboratories a spot in the emerging female-arousal industry, which is widely expected to rival the male-arousal industry in a few short years.

Already available without a prescription in North America, Europe, and several countries in Asia, the oil will run you a few bucks or more per individually foil-wrapped hit of "enhanced intimacy."

C.D.



J-Pants

While Iranian women are being punished for violating Islamic dress codes of modesty, a small segment of women in Japan are pushing the extremes of provocative fashion. Touted as a new summer fashion trend, the "ultra-low-rise jeans" (a.k.a. "bikini pants") are the latest items to be marketed to fashion-conscious youth. The equivalent of shock-jock statements in clothing design, the pants have caused a minor uproar among bloggers and web pundits around the world. While Japan's mainstream fashion remains decidedly tame, its fringe trends reflect the shifting sexual mores among the youth: sexual activity rates among teenagers have shot up to 40 percent in 2006, unthinkable for a nation once renowned for its conservatism.

J.U.

DEAR ADBUSTERS,
ONE STRANGE SECRET THAT I LEARNED, AND I THINK I ONLY LEARNED BECAUSE I AM GAY, IS THAT A GREAT DEAL OF HUMAN INTERACTION IS RATHER BAD ACTING. THANKS FOR ALL YOU DO. KEEP ON PUBLISHING. — JAY LAUBSCHER

In SEARCH *of* FLOWERS

by **Ryan Ziegler**

The power lines draped themselves from one pole to the next, and, heavenward, the bitter breath of the polar night sky was shattered by the earliest bursts of sun. Still, the stars glowed softly, while all the things under the leaves gasped for breath as the rain escaped to the sewers to converse with the alligators and rats in rhythms and tongues oppressed and forgotten by the human race. The cricket sounds washed the lost landscape with lonely violin echoes. The dew delivered itself to the emaciated patches of grass that would be eaten the following afternoon by bovine that would, eventually, be slaughtered without prayer and by machine. The windows rapped as the wind rattled as the wonderful returned. The wonderful one, Lauren P. Alexandra, returned.

The girls all thought it was a shame that she didn't care too much about cheap things, and she'd always say something that made sense out loud and during the moment, but she would always wonder what she even meant afterwards. She'd listened to others with untainted care and would delay her response. She liked it when people talked to her.

Diane Swanson understood Lauren P. Alexandra, but Kelly Adamsen didn't, and Margaret Bloom was never entirely sure. Samantha Jennings, the leader of the girls, thought Lauren to be a mere trifling, while Morgan Daniels, Samantha's best friend, and the only girl amongst them who didn't have to put make-up on in the school bathroom, always plugged her nose when Lauren got her lunch out.

Lauren, who had come to school solitary of companions, sat in the cafeteria during lunch. That was where she was supposed to sit. The girls, standing in the doorway, turned around, as Lauren sat down. Walking out in front, Samantha said:

– Lauren, you're going to the dance, right?

– Ummm . . . I hope I can. I need to ask my parents, and, ummm . . .

– Lauren, you still need to ask your parents?!

This caused the girls to burst into a deadly fit of giggles. Shocks of voices began to state that they didn't need to ask their parents. Desperately, Lauren cried:

– They'll let me go. I mean they'd let me go. They wouldn't even care if I went. They let me do what I want. I don't even have to ask. I could go if I want.

– Oh my God, Lauren, we were just kidding, calm down.

Styrofoam faces smiled facetiously. Lauren wanted to say that she knew all along and that she was just kidding too and that she was just being stupid or funny or both, but she just giggled along with them as her cheeks melted. She didn't know what was going on, but she quickly concluded that these girls were much more experienced in life than she was. After all, they didn't have to ask their parents permission for anything and she'd heard that Kelly Adamsen had made out with Joel Macgyver for 20 minutes in Joel's older brother's car and all the girls said they'd been drunk before but Lauren didn't know if it was true and had made an awful fool of herself in the middle of class when she gave an innocent giggle after having said:

– I don't think kids our age get drunk.

And, afterwards, the girls surrounded her outside her locker and stared nasty at her and said things like:

– You're like fucking stupid, you know, right?

– I got drunk just last Sunday.

– I got drunk just last night.

– Yeah, me too.

Lauren's parents said it was a nasty thing to do, but Lauren made sure they didn't go and talk to the school counselors or principal. Lauren said:

– I wasn't even scared. They didn't even beat me up.

That's what bullying was. Lauren didn't think they were awful. If they were awful they would've hit her.

She walked home, cloaked in a static anonymity, blurred into a spill of students. She stayed off the grass and off the road, and made sure not to look at the people smoking in the middle of the road because Sylvia Patches had said that she'd get beaten up if she looked at them. The left sleeve of her calico jacket was starting to fray and her t-shirt was too long. Light shone through the trees and fluttered on her freckled cheeks and she smiled when she saw a dog run by. She had her red mittens on because it was foggy out when she'd walked to school in the morning and she had no room for them in her backpack. Justin Rasinsky, who adored her because he thought she was very pretty, walked with her be-

cause his house came after hers. Lauren thought Justin was fine but annoying. Justin said:

– Did you know that Devon made fun of Travis?

– Really? Did he get in trouble?

Lauren didn't ever feign interest but she listened nicely without her heart. However, she was actually interested in Travis. Travis was the best-looking boy in the entire eighth grade; all the girls had said so. Justin knew that he had said the right thing and tried to ease a way into conversation:

– No, but I would fucking nail Devon if I was Travis, seriously.

– You would get suspended.

– Yeah, but he deserves it. You know, Travis is dating Katelyn Serras, right?

– Oh, I think I know who that is. Does she have long hair?

– She used to. She was in the principal's office today, you know?

– How come?

– She wouldn't stop talking in class.

– That's so mean. How come teachers have to do that?

– Yeah, I totally hate Mr. Malkmus! He's so gay!

– I know. Everyone hates him.

– Hey, what did you think of the story in English?

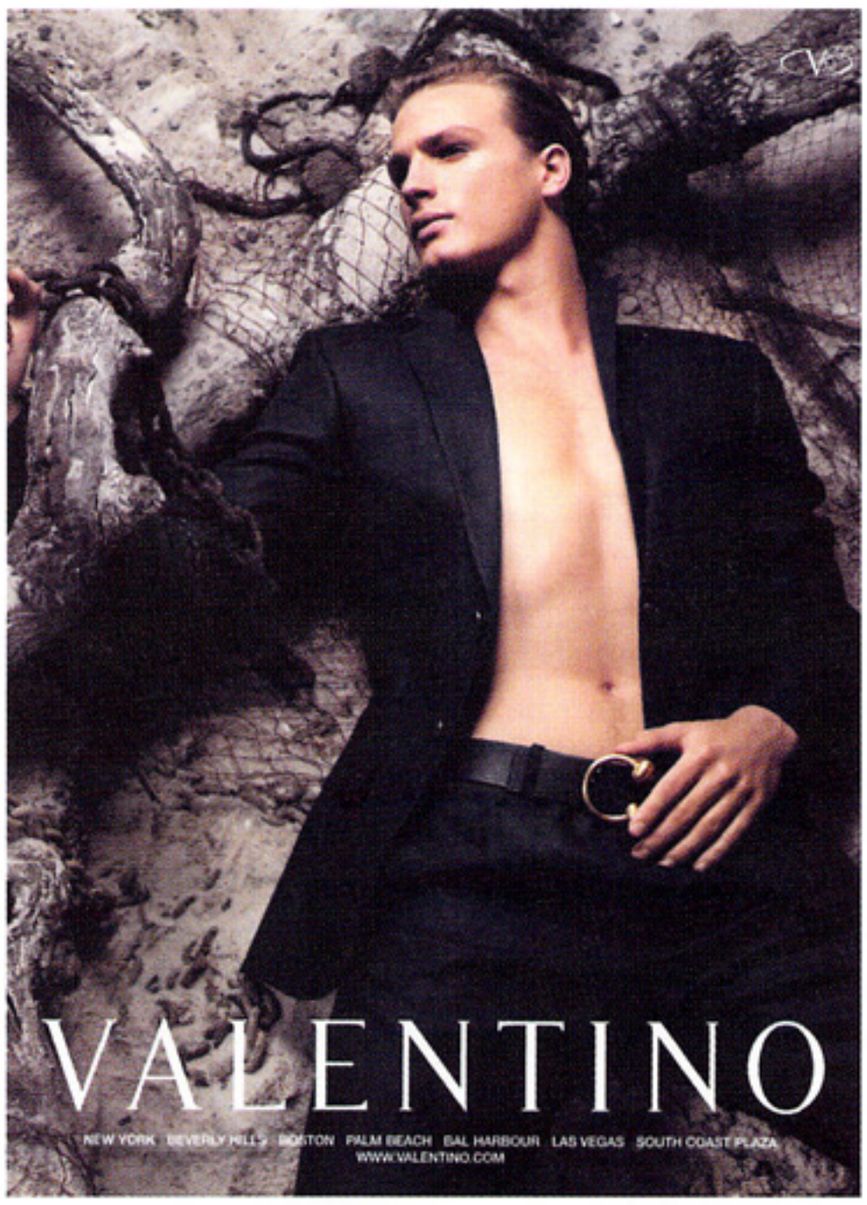
– I really liked it.

– Oh . . . Yeah, so did I . . .

– Oops!

And, just then, Lauren's right mitten fell preciously to the ground because she'd been shaking it and twisting it off unconsciously. Justin took this as a cue to be a gentleman and attempted
to retrieve the mitten. Lauren, who still attached too much meaning to the things her parents purchased, outstripped Justin's speed, hindered by the leftover excesses of childhood, and let fall her hands onto the mitten. Her virgin soul could not detect Justin's adoration, and Justin kept his heart in a bunker. They walked together with all the space between them until Lauren broke off and branched up the way that went home.

Of course she did her homework. Of course she greeted both parents. Of course she fed the dog, and then thought of the dance. She was sure it was something all teenagers did, that's what she'd tell her parents. She would even offer to pay. They could not possibly refuse her then. Of course she had no idea that her parents would let her go. Of course she had no idea that her mother would be thrilled, and her father would be hushed and proud. Of course she had no idea that her parents would not only pay but also insist on driving her, as well give her small money for chips and a pop.



Cautiously, Lauren descended down the stairs. Carefully, Lauren's parents set the table for supper. Lauren, noticing the luminous mood of her parents, began her verbal excursion to the dance:

– Hey, do you guys know what I got on my math quiz?

– No, Lauren, how could we? her mother said, Tell us.

– Well, guess, it was out of ten.

– Ten out of ten?

– Oh . . . No, I got seven and a half, but that was, like, the fourth highest mark in the class. Like, everyone else got five or six.

– Lauren, started her dad, it's a bit strange that you didn't get nine, or even eight. Didn't you study?

– Huh? Oh, yeah, I studied, of course. It's, just, math is really hard.

– But, you spend so much time working on your other classes. I mean, last night you spent two and a half hours working on your poster for science. I guess your mother and I are a bit puzzled.

Lauren recoiled. Why were they making such a big deal out of this? Lauren never liked math, and it was really hard. All the rest of the kids had even said it was; even Terry Johnson, who had the highest mark in the class didn't get full marks on it. However, if she tried to explain that to them they would respond with something like, "Well, we're talking about you, not the rest of the class." Lauren looked down at the floor, her father continued:

– I'm not trying to be heavy on you Lauren, it's just you're really bright, and I think you can get into a pattern of working half as hard as you could. Anyhow, I'll stop. How are the rest of your classes?

The tense breath she'd been holding onto, broke from her lungs, and, full of hurry, she answered:

– English is really good. I have, like, the third or second highest mark in the class, and we read a really good story, too, and Mr. Mealy is a really good teacher. He's really funny.

– I'm glad, her mother said, Yeah, you seem more like a



inspiration, purpose, sense of destiny



Humanities type, like me.

– What are Humanities?

– Courses like English and Social Studies. There are others you can take, as well, though, like Political Science, or Literature, although, you may have to wait 'til university to take those.

– Yeah, I totally love English!

Although Lauren had been transitorily sidetracked from her objective, she made quick her move:

– Hey, uh, I was wondering, I mean, only if it's okay with you guys, if I could go to the MTV dance? I mean, you can say no.

– Oh, of course. What is an MTV dance though? When is it? Where is it? How much?

Everything afraid in Lauren exited abroad in light.

– Thank you! Yes! I can pay! Yes!

– You don't have to pay. We don't expect you to pay.

– But, I have money! I really want to.

– Lauren, you don't even have a job. You get a small weekly allowance. We will pay.

– What if we split the cost halfway?

– How much does it cost to get in?

– It's fifteen dollars.

– Listen, Lauren, we want to pay for you to get in.

– Thank you so much. Aah! Yes!

– When is it? Where is it?

– Tomorrow night at the Multiplex.

– What time does it start?

– Nine o' clock, I think.

– Oh. What times does it end?

– Eleven or twelve, I think.

– Don't you think that's a bit late? Are you sure you want to stay the whole time?

– Yeeeeeeeeees!

– Who are you going with?

– Ummm . . . Samantha asked me to go with her and her friends?

– Samantha who?

– Jennings.



– Wait now, wasn't that the group of girls who bullied you at school.

– No, they didn't bully me!

Lauren's mom cut in:

– Honey, they surrounded you outside your locker. You said you were terrified remember?

– Well, it was my fault, and, I mean, they've been really nice to me at school.

– Hold on, it's not your fault at all.

– Well, I should've known that they'd drank before.

– Lauren, how would know that? They're too young to be drinking anyhow.

– Well, they've been really nice to me at school.

Lauren's dad returned to the conversation:

– Lauren, I'd feel a lot more comfortable if you went with Sylvia or Tara. Are either of them going? You should ask them. You could have a sleepover afterwards.

– But, uhh, just, but, okay. I could ask, but, like . . .

– Lauren, it's just that we're your parents, and we love you, and we want you to be with people who we know you're safe with, that's all. But, if what you're saying is that these girls are friends with you now, than I believe you.

– Oh, thank you! Umm, I was wondering if maybe I could walk there?

– Walk? It's all the way across town. Why?

– Okay, I don't have to, sorry, I just thought, sorry, okay.

Lauren's mom said:

– How 'bout we drop you off at the corner. It'd make sense. That way we don't have to drive in the parking lot.

– Yeah, I was just worried about the car. It'll be packed. Maybe you could drop me off a little bit before the corner?

– Okay.

The rest of the dinner was quiet on the outside, but inside it was loud and colorful and Lauren wanted to wear something that was pretty and made her look older and she wanted to put on make-up and maybe her mom would help her with her hair.

– Lauren, have you thought of what to wear?

– Oh, no.

– What about that denim jacket we bought for you, the one with the butterflies on it?

– Uh, well, I don't know, uh, maybe, yeah, I don't know . . .

– You don't have to. It was just an idea.

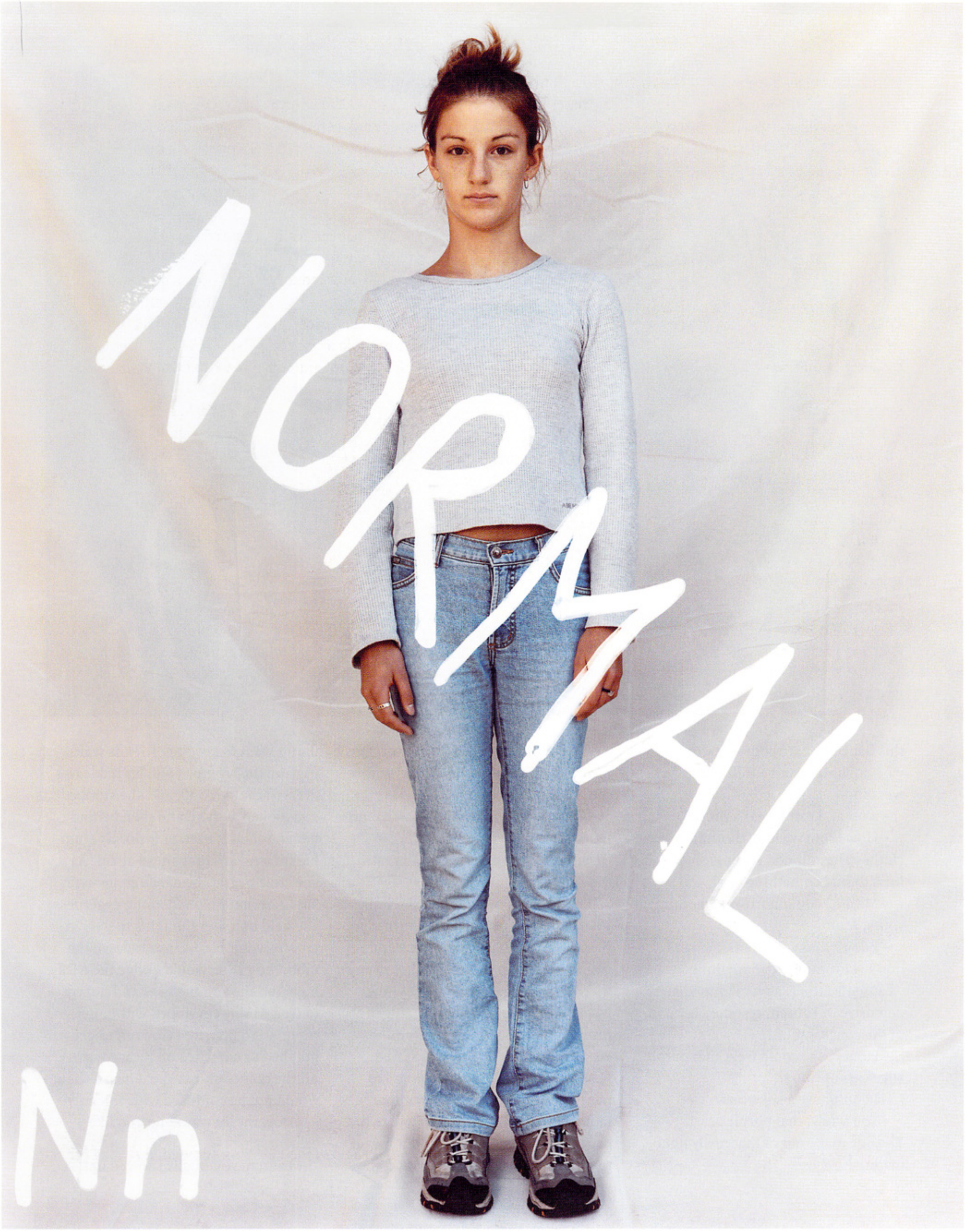
– I was thinking maybe we could buy something for it.

– I don't think so, Lauren.

– Why not?

– Because you have nice clothes. We're not buying something special for

WENDY EWALD


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WENDY EWALD

this dance. What about that dress we bought for Aunt Sarah's son's wedding?

– Noooo, I can't wear a dress.

– How 'bout we look through your clothes after dinner. It shouldn't be too hard to find something cool.

– Maybe I could borrow something of yours, Mom?

– I don't know, Lauren. It's just I don't want you to lose anything.

Lauren's father, always immediately defensive of Lauren, resumed his part of the conversation:

– Honey, she could wear that purple silk scarf of yours?

– I don't have a silk scarf.

– You know, that purple scarf. The one made out of that really light material.

– I don't think so. That's one of my favorites. What about the green with the blue and gold trim?

– Oh, Lauren, you would look beautiful in that. What about that?

Lauren's gleaming smile and gratitude answered her father.

The wind was warm while she walked. The wonderful one Lauren returned to the world. She placed her steps and set course and never thought of going anywhere else because she didn't know where else to go and never indulged nearly long enough in a silent mind, even though her mouth was stayed. Not even a whistle was permitted to pass through her lips. It was important for her to soon arrive to where the dance was being held: she didn't want to be swallowed by the street and she didn't want to keep her friends waiting and the ivy green and ivy red leaves dressed the sidewalk and she stopped and looked at them and then behind her and then started to forlornly stumble forward straight ahead again. As she stole nearer the dance center with slight hesitation but definite eagerness, she held onto her thoughts to guarantee she wouldn't disappear down the rabbit hole. She would dodge the tricky boys and the zombie boys and hoped to God to stay enveloped within her friends and hoped to God not to get grabbed or snatched up by harpy girls. All the names of lust she'd heard about would not be confused with sincerity.

Inside, the air was solid and like cement.

– Lauren, you finally showed up!

– Yeah! Hey . . . How are you guys?

She didn't recognize some of the girls her friends were with, their eyes thin and artificial. She had a hard time recognizing her friends, smiling like lasers. She hoped to God she would recognize herself. She saw Darren Muloney, who was cute even though he had a crooked smile. Her voice was tinny and tiny because the music was loud, and her nerves were all blue in bundle, all done up tight. Her voice was tinny and tiny and tight when she said:

– So, good music, yeah?

– This song is so gay.

– Oh yeah, I know.

– Like, seriously, the video for this sucks so hard.

– I know. I hate it.

Most of her friends and their friends were with boys with hats and simple t-shirts and jeans, and they were all holding onto some part of one another. One of the thin-eyed harpy girls spotted someone in the crowd:

– Oh my God, I can't believe Janice Reynolds is here. She is such a fucking bitch.

Everyone agreed silently. Lauren saw Travis in the crowd, with friends, of course. Another one of the harpies opened her baneful beak saying to Lauren:

– Weren't you on my soccer team or something? I know you, I think.

– Ummm . . . Maybe. I was on a green team.

But, the bird was clearly finished with her worm, and Lauren had ended up answering air emptier than the girl in front of her. Samantha looked over at Lauren and said:

– Hey, sweetie, can I borrow two dollars, please? I swear I'll pay you back on Monday?

– Oh, sure. Here.

Lauren's dad had given her a five dollar bill. As she, the bait, fished in her mom's old purse for it she listened in on her new friends and their boyfriends:

– Yeah, I was all like, hey, fuck you, man. It was sooo funny.

– Man, that guy so wants your girl. You can totally tell.

– Man, you're such a fag. He doesn't. He's, like, gayer than you are.

This caused all around to laugh and jeer at the receiver.

– Oh, man, what a burn.

Lauren handed her money to Samantha, and felt a devil was nearby:

– Oh, thanks babe, we'll all be right back.

Lauren already knew she'd become a discarded rag-doll. Her futile words sounded horrible to her when she said them out loud. Her words were forced and desperate, and sounded like what they were: the regrets of a girl trying to get her friends to stay:

– Hey, guys, you know what we should do when we're older? We should all go to prom together.

Lauren was just as shocked and disgusted with her words as the ones around her were. Kelly, who'd been kissing a boy ever since Lauren had arrived, broke the silence:

– Okaaaaay. Riiiight.

Lauren turned around to try and find a way out, but Justin, who'd just walked over to ask Lauren for a dance, stood in her way. He'd just given the girls reason to stay and burn a fire a little longer. Justin was a boy easily offended by rich people and people in brand name clothing and frequently made a fool out of himself for it:

– Oh my God, is this your boyfriend, or something?

– What?! No! Of course not! Never!

Morgan took the lead:

– Oh my God, Justin Rasinsky. You're such a homo. Seriously, get out of here. Don't you dare come closer.

– What?!

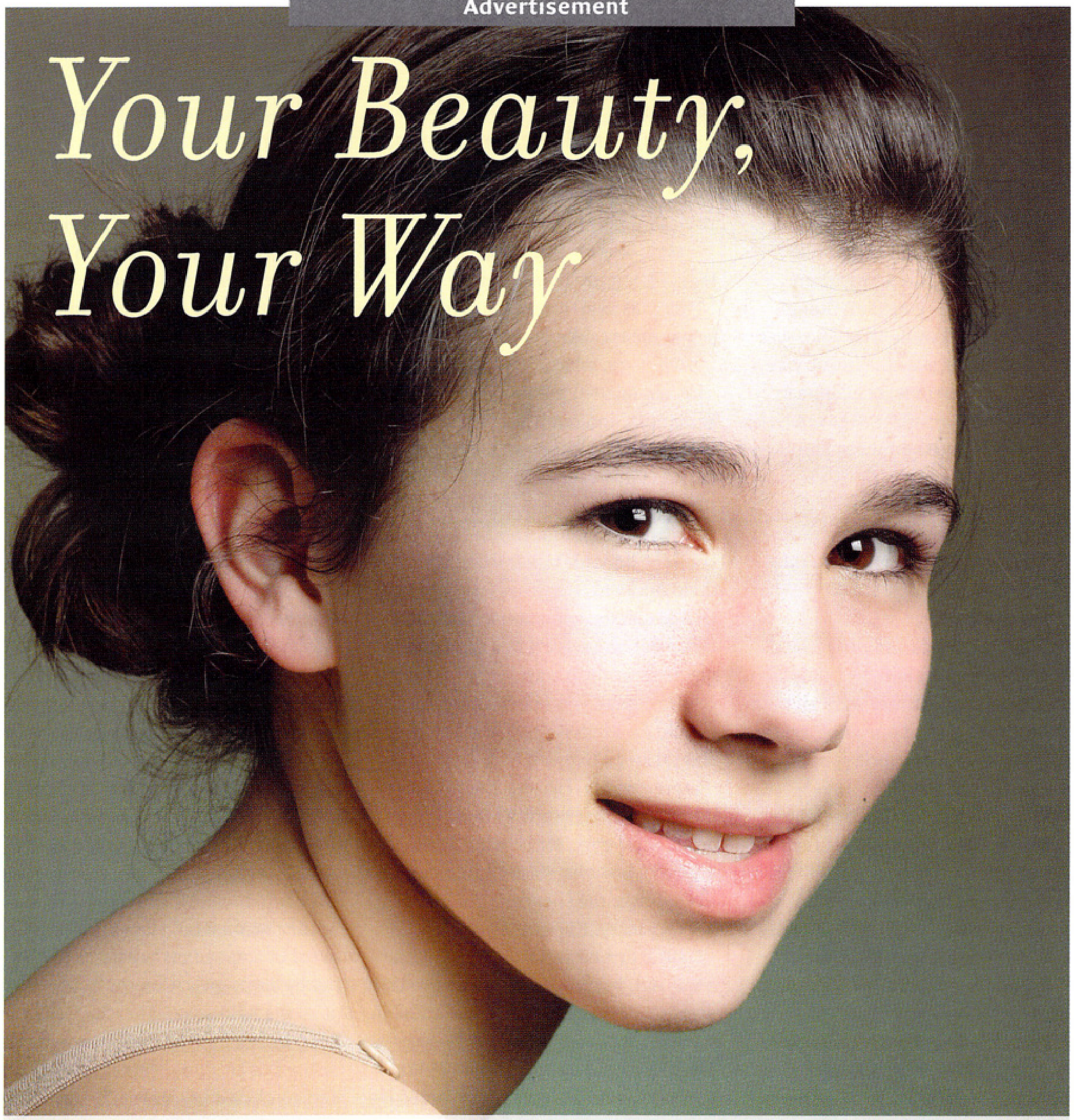
– You're so gay. I hate people who are mean to my friends, don't you ever talk shit about me and my friends. Oh my God, you guys, let's go, this sucks, seriously.

Lauren felt their shadows tread all over and away from her. Like a kettle at boiling peak, her eyes hot watered over. She wiped the tears onto her hands, she wiped her hands onto her black skirt, having had her night wiped away. She couldn't call home or else her dad would've been right, but she couldn't be seen with Justin either. Heavy her face with tears, the weary one Lauren retreated from the world. The weary one Lauren retreated to the bathroom.

She did come out. She was in the bathroom for ten minutes. She was young and she wiped her sadness onto a paper towel. She heard a song she remembered, and all the vicissitudes only ever experienced in story became real, as life shot through the airwaves to her, creating mellifluous and invisible non-iniquities heard only by rogues and similar pariahs; those who held no Bible, those who sometimes thought of running away, and those who did, knew the notes hanging in the air. The sound waves battered her blue woe, and she could breath; she was no longer a beetle person who'd just been exterminated or stepped on or eaten and shat out by harpy girls. Curious kids gazed at all the light around her face; she was beautiful and not beautiful enough; she refused to be alone. That's why the heat and air circled her when she saw him. That's why she pulled towards him, to try and make a home with him in the lights and music. That's why her dirty nails became shorter as she went alone and slowly, and had no one to talk to about it. That's why the war in her chest culminated as the skinny words waltzed from her lips. The light, all but jagged anymore, felt clean. Air went to her lungs smoothly, and she went in search of flowers.

Ryan Ziegler is 17 years old, and lives in Prince George, British Columbia, Canada.

Advertisement



Dermatologists know that makeup can harbor acne-causing bacteria. That moisturizers can clog your pores, causing nasty blackheads and whiteheads. That many cosmetics contain allergens like lanolin (grease secreted by sheep) and carmine (made from crushed beetles) that can give you rashy, blotchy skin.

So why does the beauty industry insist that you need their products to be pretty? Do they make more money when you're happy and confident? Or when you're plagued by "imperfections" that they just happen to be able to "fix"?

Luckily, it's easy to take care of your skin without buying into the game. Wash it gently. Get plenty of sleep. Drink water. Exercise. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Don't overdo it in the sun. Easy, inexpensive and natural.

Why let the beauty industry tell you how to feel about yourself?

It's your beauty. Do it your way.

This is a message from the Adbusters Media Foundation. We're not selling you a product, just sharing an idea. www.adbusters.org

RANDALL COSCO

Version two of our initial ad concept. Based on your feedback, we set out to reduce the amount of copy, while still speaking to teenage girls in an intelligent, non-condescending manner. We also altered the language to emphasize self-reliance, self-confidence and personal choice. Help to refine the concept – or send it in a radical new direction – by joining the discussion at <adbusters.org>.

Girls vs. Marketing Madness, Part II

In the previous issue of *Adbusters*, we told you about our evolving plan to reach out of our own pages and speak directly to pre-teen and teenage girls, the one group that is pursued the most relentlessly by marketers, and the one group that is among the most negatively affected by advertising. We asked our younger female readers for their thoughts on our initial concept for a public service ad that shares a few truths about beauty products and the industry that pushes them.

I am a 17 year old girl living in Canadian suburbia who was fortunate enough to discover your magazine about two years ago. Since that time I'm proud to say that I've replaced my *Teen Vogues* and *Seventeens* with magazines worth reading. However, most girls my age still love these trashy magazines and have never given any thought to it.

We are all aware of how destructive this seemingly harmless "light reading" really is. Eating disorders, depression and low self-confidence can all be side effects of reading teen girl magazines. The lives of youth these days are difficult enough without continuous comparisons to the photoshopped models in lip gloss ads, and the last thing that girls need are ads explaining how we need to fit into molds to be considered popular or pretty. So why do we do it? Why do we keep coming back for more?

Simple. Teen girl magazines are tools used to fill a void, regardless of the consequences. We all want to be pretty and popular. The only problem is we don't know how to do it, so we gladly embrace the rules they give us. Think about it logically: it's easy to accept a superficial doctrine and leave the critical thinking to others. It's practically unfashionable to have a unique opinion.

Please! Go after these media monsters. But don't do it alone. Teenage girls are not nearly as unintelligent as one may assume and this is a tricky subject to tackle. Ignorance is bliss and many people (male or female, young or old) do not want a wake-up call. As crazy as it seems, it can be comfortable, even reassuring, to view an ad featuring $300 jeans. It's a simple, attainable goal, whereas global awareness is both unglamorous and terrifying.

My suggestion: gather a team of typical teenage girls and 20 year old women who are passionate about this topic. Learn from them, and listen to their opinions and ideas. A demographic will only listen to people they find relatable and trustworthy – in this case, other young women.

It's not impossible. Youth is the time when people learn the habits and values that will follow them throughout their lives. Wouldn't it be fantastic for girls to have the confidence and enthusiasm to take on real world issues? I know teenage girls, and I know the intelligence and potential that can be either suppressed or encouraged. Give them the chance to prove the world wrong; they deserve it.

Leah Karpus
Maple Ridge, British Columbia, Canada

Think it's easy to get a dissident message into mainstream corporate magazines? We sent version one of our ad concept to three of the top teen girl magazines in North America: *Seventeen*, *CosmoGIRL!*, and *Teen Vogue*. A full-page ad in any of these rags will run you between $80,000 and $115,000. Here's what happened:



Seventeen
The advertising rep from *Seventeen* emailed us a pretty terse response: "Unfortunately, we cannot accept this ad. Please let me know if you need anything else." We sent two follow-up emails requesting clarification of their reasons, but both went unanswered.

After a month of waiting, we called the representative directly. She explained that she is not at liberty to discuss their advertising policies, and that it would be up to "higher-ups" to disclose anything to us. When we asked to be put into contact with those higher-ups, the response was "We'll call you." They haven't.



Teen Vogue
"I had to run this ad request through corporate, as the subject matter could have further ramifications on our business overall. Corporate has decided that we, as a company, cannot accept this ad." At least they were forthcoming with their reasons.



CosmoGIRL!
According to their advertising rep, *CosmoGIRL!* is open to running the ad, provided that we are willing to 1) include the word "Advertisement" at the top to differentiate it from editorial, 2) include our logo, website address, or phone number for people to respond, and 3) provide supporting documentation or evidence to substantiate the claims in the ad copy.

In fact, we agree wholeheartedly with all of these requirements, and have no problem complying. But we are left wondering if *CosmoGIRL!* sets such stringent standards for all of its regular beauty-industry advertisers.

my



Viral is an eerily appropriate way to describe North Americans' emphatic plunge into user-propelled online social networks like MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, and their ever-burgeoning rivals and niche alternatives. During the past few years, these netizen "communities" have mutated and spread like a multi-strain epidemic, enveloping whole demographic groups in vast virtual waves – from academic pioneers to teenagers to twentysomething hipsters to those over 30 striving to stay connected, both figuratively and literally. To give one stunning example: since inviting the general public to subscribe last September, Facebook's user base of approximately six million students has more than quadrupled, surging to number two among social networking giants behind only MySpace's 100 million-plus members.

Amid such rapid and widespread fixation, the wisdom of Sherry Turkle – director of MIT's Technology and Self program and author of the seminal *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* – is especially prescient. "Our society tends toward a breathless techno-enthusiasm," Turkle told *New Scientist* last year when asked if she worried about the way social networking is changing how people relate to one another. "We communicate with quick instant messages, 'check-in' cell calls and emoticon graphics. All of these are meant to quickly communicate a state. They are not meant to open a dialogue about complexity of feeling."

Forebodingly, Turkle goes on to say: "The self that grows up with multitasking and rapid response measures success by calls made, emails answered, messages responded to."

Put another way, the narrative heritage that we've developed over thousands of years seems to be shifting towards a new vernacular, one that prizes quantity over quality. This isn't a new trend – it's certainly been escalating alongside the advent of cellphones, instant messaging, and the like – but it's perhaps best exemplified by online social networking. Online "friends," for example, tend to be collected (competitively, in many cases) rather than cultivated. Personal messages and postings shared

GETTY IMAGES

space



amongst those friends tend to be typified by clever irreverence, e-jargon and conceit rather than real intimacy or complexity.

In fact, the communication patterns we're employing with popular tech advances are oddly reminiscent of the way that advertisers try and reach their target audiences. Our diction is becoming simpler, yet more stylish. Our ability to draw attention amongst the litany of banter is increasingly vital if we want our individual voices heard. In essence, networking netizens are getting better and better at producing what amounts to 30-second spots about our states of mind, our ambitions, our whereabouts, our passions and obsessions.

This makes the inevitable next phase in online social networking's development somewhat more ominous. As the corporate world embraces and forecasts the revenue potential of Web 2.0, so too are plans to infiltrate its emerging models afoot. Already, brands as diverse as Toyota Prius, Nike and Barack Obama have launched their own online communities.

But witness the glut of start-ups competing to create even more niche networks that cater to individuals and groups looking for flexibility and focus not offered by the mammoth general interest communities (MySpace et al). These new players – BlogTronix, PeopleAggregator, Ning, Onesite, Crowd Factory, to name a random few – are in the business of delivering social networking "solutions," as well as integrating new advertising streams into the online community model. Crowd Factory's website, for example, puts it quite plainly: "To help companies leverage the new medium, we have developed a social media platform and toolset to power white-label social network communities."

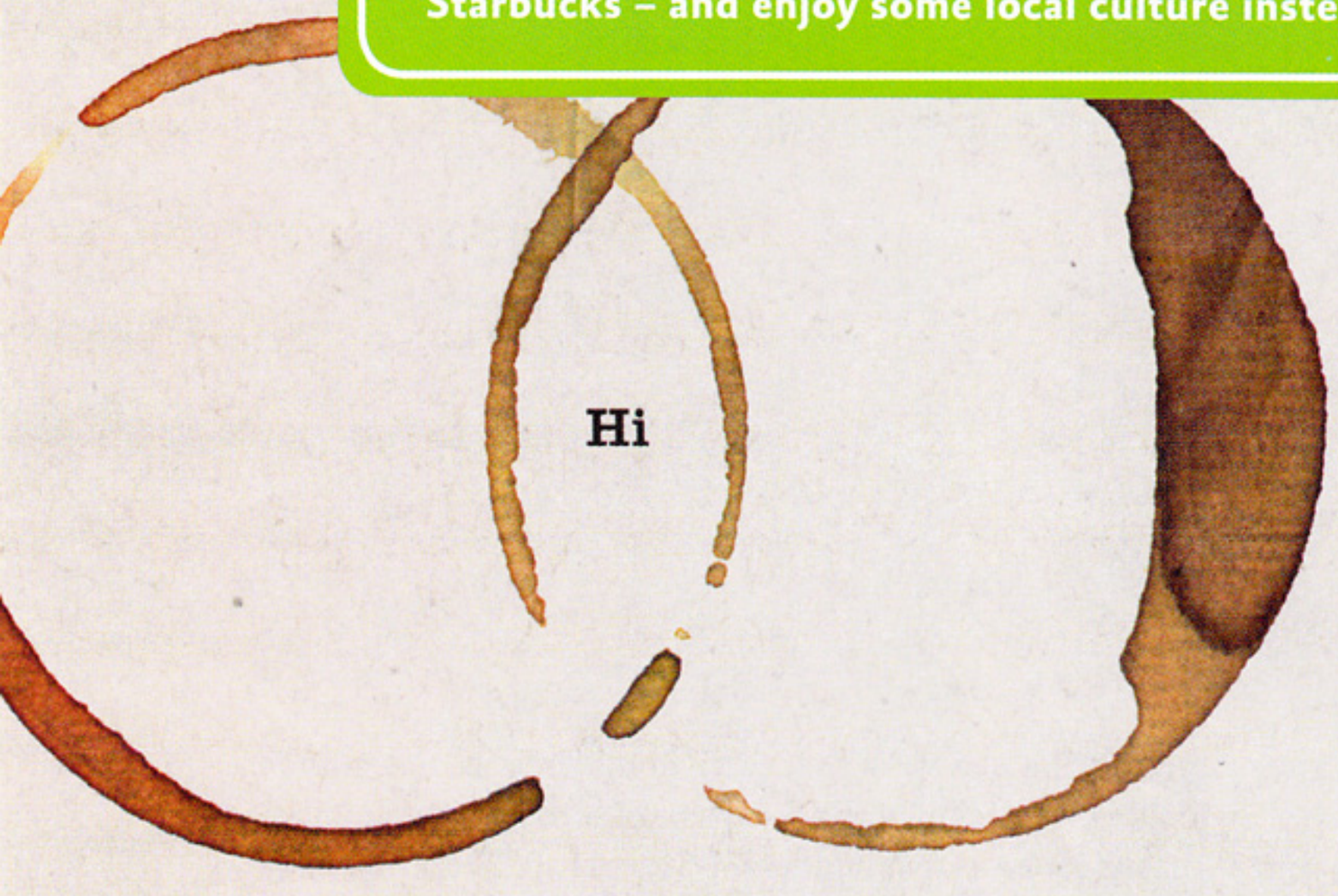
Is there a purpose to this new breed of online social network beyond data mining its membership? Given our newfound propensity for advertising ourselves in such a similar fashion, will we still be able to keep some distance between communities that we've created in earnest, and ones concocted by corporate interests?

– Eric Rumble

RECONNECT

Imagine a city, in which there is only *one* kind of coffee shop. *One* kind of burger place. *One* pizzeria. *One* supermarket. *One* pub.

Remember what diversity felt like? The fun of discovering something unexpected, in a place you haven't been before? Variety and local flavour matter for vibrant, healthy communities. Go ahead, **ditch Starbucks – and enjoy some local culture instead.**





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MARCH 15TH, 2007, 10AM–NOON

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Text Me All About Yourself

If you've ever felt the need to know what every single one of your chums is doing at every hour of every day, then count yourself lucky. They may now volunteer to surveil themselves for your amusement and edification, all thanks to an emerging breed of mobile messaging services with names like Jaiku, Twitter and Dodgeball.

The idea is simple: you sign up, you're buddies sign up, you send texts via your mobile phone to the messaging service, and then it routes those texts to everyone on your contact list. At the coffee shop with nothing to entertain you? Let them all know. Walking your dog in the park? Let them know. With your mom shopping for socks? Dammit, let them know.

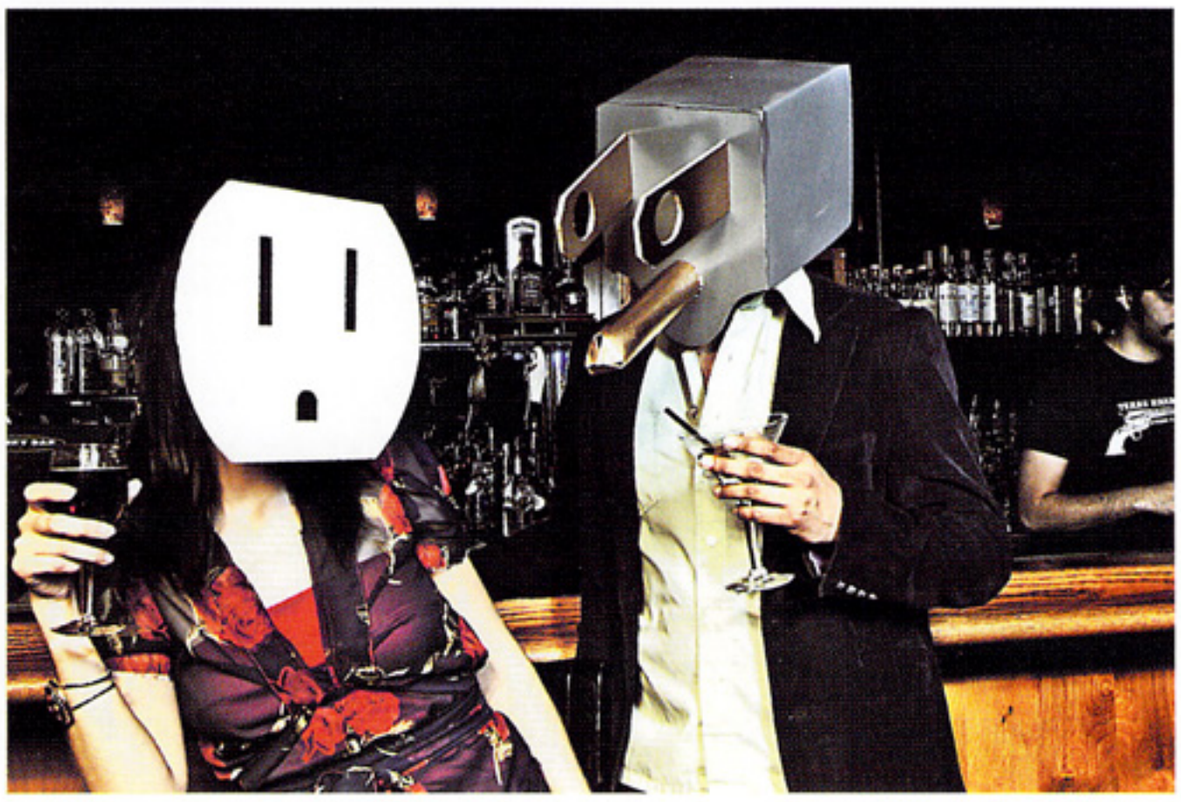
Only, you have to do it in 140 characters or less, which is a wee bit longer than the sentence that you've just finished reading.

Biz Stone is the co-founder of Twitter, the most pared-down and quite likely the fastest growing of the pack. He's quick to clarify that Twitter is technically a "device agnostic message routing system," which to most of us means that you can send and receive messages – "tweets" in the brand lingo – in a number of ways, including the Twitter website, mobile phones, instant messaging clients and downloadable desktop applications.

"The day-to-day advantage," notes Stone, "is the ability to stay connected with friends and family members any time using a variety of devices."

Sound nifty? It can be. Consider the ease of checking in to see if anybody wants to join you in an hour for yakisoba, or to catch the *Porky's* retrospective at that eastside rep cinema.

Take a look at the public message history on the Twitter homepage, though, and it becomes apparent that this isn't the only way, or even that primary way, that people are using the service. The first thing you'll notice, at least as an outsider, is the relative banality of the tweets – there's a preponderance along the lines of "Watching Jimmy Kimmel embarrass a couple of high school kids in Scrabble," or the shorter and sweeter "Wasted. Loving it."



CONNECT

Charles Klein is an Arcata, California-based web designer who has been using Twitter for the last five months or so. "I find I use Twitter as a mini-blog," he explains, "tending to post random thoughts and feelings in addition to things that I am doing. I also like to post links to random things I find throughout the day."

Klein even has praise for the pithy nature of the medium, saying, "I tend to favor the use of Twitter over a blog because it is so quick and to the point, and can accomplish basically the same thing."

Fellow Californian and Twitterer "Adora" might agree. The self-described "web 2.0 voyeur" got onboard a couple of months ago and says, "I try to update with items of interest to everyone following me. Neat geeky things I do through my job and website, the wacky things that I catch myself doing . . . I recently cut my thumb in half with a butter knife (don't ask) and after I pulled the knife out my first thought was 'Oh man, I know I'm bleeding everywhere, but I just have to Twitter this.'"

Adora and Klein have one more thing in common, an expected consequence of granting people the ability to spontaneously contact just about everyone they know, wherever they are: they've both had to nix people who Twittered too often, too inanely.

"It was a person that I did not know except through Twitter," Klein reveals, "Once he posted one too many play-by-play accounts for that evening's *Dancing With The Stars*, I promptly removed him from the list. As ridiculous as this service is, that somehow seemed to push the limit."

While Stone acknowledges that some users require "an adjustment period coupled with feedback from friends to find just the right level of participation," he also points out that Twitter lets people manage how, when and from whom they receive messages. As to why certain users don't easily glom onto the fact that they might be pestering their pals, Stone suggests that Twitter differs from other means of communication because "users do not expect replies to their updates nor do they feel obligated to review friends' updates with any significant comprehension. This shift in expectations means friends and family members can stay connected in real time as it suits them in an ambient, non-disruptive manner."

Connecting without disrupting? If that sounds like an unlikely combination, perhaps you've been wasting too much time rubbing elbows with other messy flesh bags, and not enough time amassing armies of "friends" on MySpace and Facebook. Much like those other social networking revelations, Twitter is – for better or for worse – a love letter to the open-door policy, and for every user who is merely there to keep in touch, there has to be at least one crashing bore of a showboat, careerist self-aggrandizer, or compulsive self-archivist.

Happily, since Twitter's one-text-for-all spirit allows you to treat the individual entries in your contact list as essentially interchangeable, you can afford to be a bit mercenary in dealing with such riffraff.

"The majority of the people I've added are people I've never met," explains Adora, "but if their updates aren't consistently humorous or inspirational, I'm not getting much value and I'll stop following that person. It sounds a bit harsh, but we are talking about immediate 24/7 interruption here."

"The people I really know," she adds, "I put up with whatever they broadcast."

– *Clayton Dach*

.xxx

In late March, the longstanding proposal to create a .xxx domain specifically for porn sites was definitively shot down by ICANN, the US corporation that oversees the assignment of domain names and IP addresses. The proposal formed an unlikely alliance between pornographers and conservative religious groups, with the former arguing that the suffix would ghettoize their business, and the latter protesting that it would just create more ways to serve up porn.



Web 2.0

"There are by some counts more than 400 social-networking sites, all trying to become the next MySpace; more than 200 web-video sites, all trying to become the next YouTube; more than 300 'social-bookmarking' sites, and hundreds of 'meta-sites' that 'aggregate' the other sites by spitting out computer-generated lists of hyperlinks. Rhetorically, the entrepreneurs behind these sites usually claim that they will make money from 'advertising.' In reality, most hope to sell themselves to Google, Yahoo!, News Corporation or one of the other 'new' or 'old' media giants long before they have to prove any revenue model."

– *Andreas Kluth in* The Economist

Play for pay

For many, the phrase "professional gamer" may conjure up images of Korean pop-culture superstars twitching their thumbs furiously in televised matches. For the vast majority of professional gamers, however, the job means staggeringly long hours for abysmal wages and no days off. Based primarily in China, the Philippines, Indonesia and Mexico, gaming sweatshops employ half a million or more players to accrue virtual goods and powerful avatars in multi-player online games. These are sold for real-world currency to affluent gamers who don't have the time, skill or inclination to earn them personally.

Crank up the

I am outside in the snow walking my dog Buddy across a field by our house. It is his favorite place because there are lots of good "smells," I take him off the leash and we run.

Buddy is a golden retriever that we got two years ago at the pound. He had heartworms and was very sick. Buddy had been found by the Marion Humane Society wandering the streets. Our vet told us we would spend as much treating heartworms as we would on a purebred puppy. But he was already our dog. I joke that Buddy took one look at our house and decided we looked good and he was going to stick around. Buddy was four at the time. That first year he was with us I was finishing grad school and wrote at home, Buddy was my support and companion.

During our walk, I notice him limping and stop. He immediately turns to me and lifts his paw for me to clean the snow that had become packed in-between the pads of his foot. In that moment, the world was perfectly clear and in sharp focus. Time stopped. The colors were brighter because I knew pure love and trust.

– Adrienne L. Bliss



Microsoft

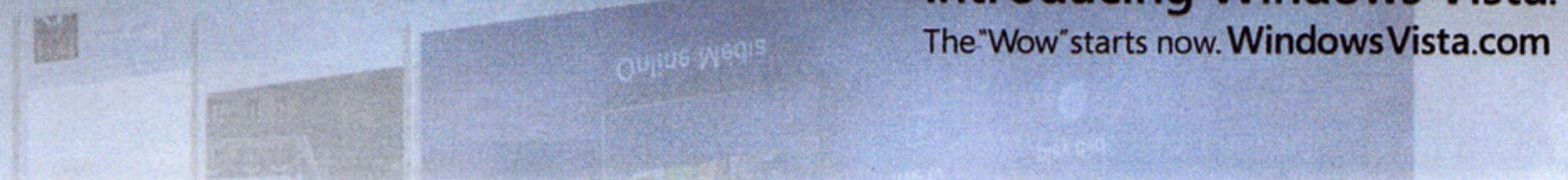
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TAMING THE *Watchdogs* OF MEDIA CONCENTRATION

by **SEAN CONDON**

When Australia's Rupert Murdoch threw his support behind the Iraq War, so did the 175 media outlets he owns as part of News Corp. When Canada's CanWest Global Communications justified the Afghanistan invasion, so did its eleven daily newspapers and 16 television stations. And when the major US media conglomerates signed off on the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq, American journalists lined up right behind them. In a recent interview on PBS's *Bill Moyers Report*, former *CBS Evening News* anchorman Dan Rather explained why journalists were so afraid to question the war.

"Fear is in every newsroom in the country . . . particularly in [the] networks," said Rather. "They've become huge international conglomerates. They have big needs, legislative needs, regulatory needs in Washington. Nobody has to send you a memo to tell you that that's the case – you know. And that puts a seed in your mind of well, 'If you stick your neck out, if you take the risk of going against the grain with your reporting, is anybody going to back you up?'"

Although the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have shown that media conglomerates limit the diversity of views, subvert democracy and stymie journalistic integrity, Canada, America and Australia's media regulators continue to let them expand. In fact, over the past decade, media regulators have gone out of their way to help facilitate consolidation or have refused to speak up against it – all to the detriment of the public's interest. As each of these three countries enters another round of media convergence, their federal media watchdogs appear to be looking the other way.

In Canada,

three major media mergers are awaiting approval from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) as of *Adbusters*' press deadline – mergers that could erase some of the last remaining borders on the country's media ownership map. Over the course of the past year, CTVglobemedia spent $1.4 billion to acquire CHUM Limited, which would give the country's highest-rated broadcaster control over the third-highest; media monolith CanWest Global Communications announced it was swallowing specialty broadcaster Alliance Atlantis Communications in a $2.3 billion deal; and Astral Media Incorporated announced it had spent $1.2 billion to acquire Standard Broadcasting, transforming it into the largest radio broadcaster in the country.

If Canada had an effective media regulator, it would be virtually impossible to get these deals approved. Not only do they dramatically reshape the country's media landscape by concentrating it in fewer hands, two of the deals blatantly contravene Canada's Broadcasting Act. The CTVglobemedia deal breaks CRTC regulations by giving it two television stations in five major cities, and since US investment firm Goldman Sachs is bankrolling the CanWest deal, it infringes upon the CRTC's foreign-ownership rule. But while CRTC commissioners acted tough when grilling CTVglobemedia about the merits of the deal at a public hearing last April, the commission appears to be predictably getting out of the way – CRTC chairman Konrad von Finckenstein commented that the commission is "not in the business of killing deals."

The one benefit of the acquisitions is that they appear to have finally awakened the CRTC to the growing problem of consolidation. Whereas in previous years it has only been concerned with the levels of Canadian content and competition rules, for the first time in its history the CRTC will hold broader public hearings this fall on media diversity. But for many critics, this delayed revelation is too little, too late. The CRTC was originally supposed to hold media diversity hearings in the spring to coincide with the three proposed mergers, but pushed them back to a later date in order to give each of the conglomerates "procedural fairness." Some have complained that this is about as useful as closing the barn door after the horses have stampeded out.

Catherine Murray, an associate professor at Simon Fraser University's School of Communication, says the decision to postpone the diversity hearings until the fall is "extremely unfortunate and adhockery" since the CRTC is about to rule on three mergers that will have a major impact on news sharing and local news operations in Canada. What's worse is that the CRTC doesn't give the public any real opportunity to debate the consequences of the proposed conquests.

"We are in a completely lopsided environment where citizens groups and concerned individuals aren't able to . . . oppose the dominant powers before the CRTC, and nothing is being done about it," says Murray. "The day of assuming the CRTC would automatically be a trustee of the public interest is long gone."

CRTC spokesperson Denis Carmel says the public hearings are needed in order to create "clear rules that govern media concentration" and its impact on the diversity of voices in the broadcasting system. But the discussion will be moot if the CRTC approves the three mega-mergers, since there won't be much media left over to fight for. While the CRTC now pretends to be concerned about the impact of consolidation, the reality is that it has to take responsibility for putting Canada's media in this mess in the first place. Over the past decade the CRTC has repeatedly bowed to the demands of the country's media empires and aided and abetted their attempts to consolidate the industry.

The commission allowed media corporations to expand the number of radio and television stations they own across the country and enabled them to own more than one television station in a single market. Its most egregious decision, however, was in 2001 when it sanctioned the controversial practice of convergence and allowed the conglomerates to combine their television and print operations – a decision that was condemned by the International Federation of Journalists for degrading the quality of reporting.

The CRTC's ineffectiveness as a watchdog goes beyond its role in facilitating consolidation. While it continues to let corporations take a stranglehold over the media landscape, the CRTC has failed to ensure that the airwaves remain open to the public. For more than 30 years, the CRTC has done nothing when public interest groups are denied access to commercial airtime. Over the past ten years, Adbusters Media Foundation has attempted to have its commercials air on Canada's largest public and private broadcasters, but the ads have consistently been rejected because they go against the grain of "commercial broadcasting." The CRTC's only response to the infringement has been to order the networks to write Adbusters a letter explaining their decision. In 2004, Adbusters launched a lawsuit against six Canadian broadcasters for refusing to run its ads and is now attempting to add the CRTC to its application.

"Our position is that the CRTC and the Canadian government as a whole have failed to do what the Charter [of Rights and Freedoms] requires that they do; to protect the rights of Canadians to access the airwaves," says Ryan Dalziel, a lawyer with Bull, Housser & Tupper LLP, which represents Adbusters.

In Australia,

where the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has been deathly silent to the country's growing media consolidation problem, the failings and faults of its national media regulators are nearly identical to those of Canada. In a country that gave birth to Rupert Murdoch's media empire, the ACMA has only helped it grow and flourish. When Australia's Conservative government passed a series of media reform laws last year that removed some of the final barriers to complete media convergence, the ACMA was nowhere to be seen. Australia already has one of the highest concentrations of media ownership in the western world with two families, the Murdochs and Packers, controlling the country's newspaper and television markets. The government's new media laws lifted the 20 year old ban on cross-ownership and now allows each corporation to operate in two out of three media sectors – print, television or radio.

Since Australia's media reform laws were passed, there has been a dizzying amount of convergence activity. Murdoch's News Corp., the country's largest newspaper publisher, bought and then sold a portion of Fairfax Media, the country's second largest newspaper chain, which in turn, purchased Rural Press, the country's third largest newspaper chain, for $2.3 billion. Seven Network, the country's top-rated television network, bought a small share of Fairfax and increased its share of West Australian Newspaper, giving it more control over the country's fourth largest publisher and opening the door for a complete takeover. Packer has also gotten into the mix by selling a controlling stake in Channel Nine and then buying NBN Network. With media companies now able to dip in and out of new mediums, there has also been a flurry of speculation on further sales and acquisitions.

Jock Given, a media expert at Swinburne University of Technology's Institute for Social Research, says Australia's already heavily consolidated media already has a strong bias toward John Howard's Conservative government at the expense of any opposition. He says the new media laws are only going to have a negative impact by consolidating the limited range of opinions into even fewer hands and wiping out some of the last remaining independent voices. While the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has at least expressed some concern about the mergers (albeit in strictly business terms), the ACMA has said nothing about this media manipulation.

When the Howard government brought its media reform laws before the ACMA, it was only for the organization to determine how it was going to enforce the new rules and not to review whether they would be detrimental to the public's interest. Although the ACMA's website says its official vision is to be "forward-looking, proactive and flexible" and that it encourages a "vibrant communications sector," the reality is anything but. While Canada's media regulator at least pretends to be defending the public perspective in the face of media consolidation, the ACMA doesn't even bother.

"When it comes down to it, the [ACMA's] interest is not in the level of diversity needed for democracy. Their focus is on the business competition," says Glenys Stradijot, campaign manager for Friends of ABC, a public interest group that defends the country's public broadcaster. "The reality is they're not going to protect media diversity to the extent that's really needed."

In all fairness to the ACMA and the CRTC, their hands are tied behind their back since neither country's government has afforded them the opportunity to be a proper watchdog. Each media regulator only has as much power as its legislation gives them. In Australia and Canada that means they are kept on a very short leash. It also doesn't look like it will get better anytime soon. While Howard has talked about loosening media ownership rules for a decade, Canada's new Conservative government has said it wants to scrap the CRTC altogether. When Canada's Senate completed an extensive study last year that proposed large mergers be automatically reviewed by the government, Heritage Minister Bev Oda brushed off the report, saying that " . . . convergence has become an essential business strategy for media organizations to stay competitive."

In the US,

giant media conglomerates like General Electric and Time Warner have tightly wrapped themselves around every aspect of media distribution. But while Canada and Australia suffer from toothless media regulators too weak and ineffectual to stop these monsters, the US has a media regulator that is aggressively pursuing to dismantle its own regulations. After being rebuked by Congress and the courts in 2003 for trying to remove caps on the number of stations a company can own and allow it to own both newspapers and television, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is once again holding a series of public hearings across the country about weakening convergence laws.

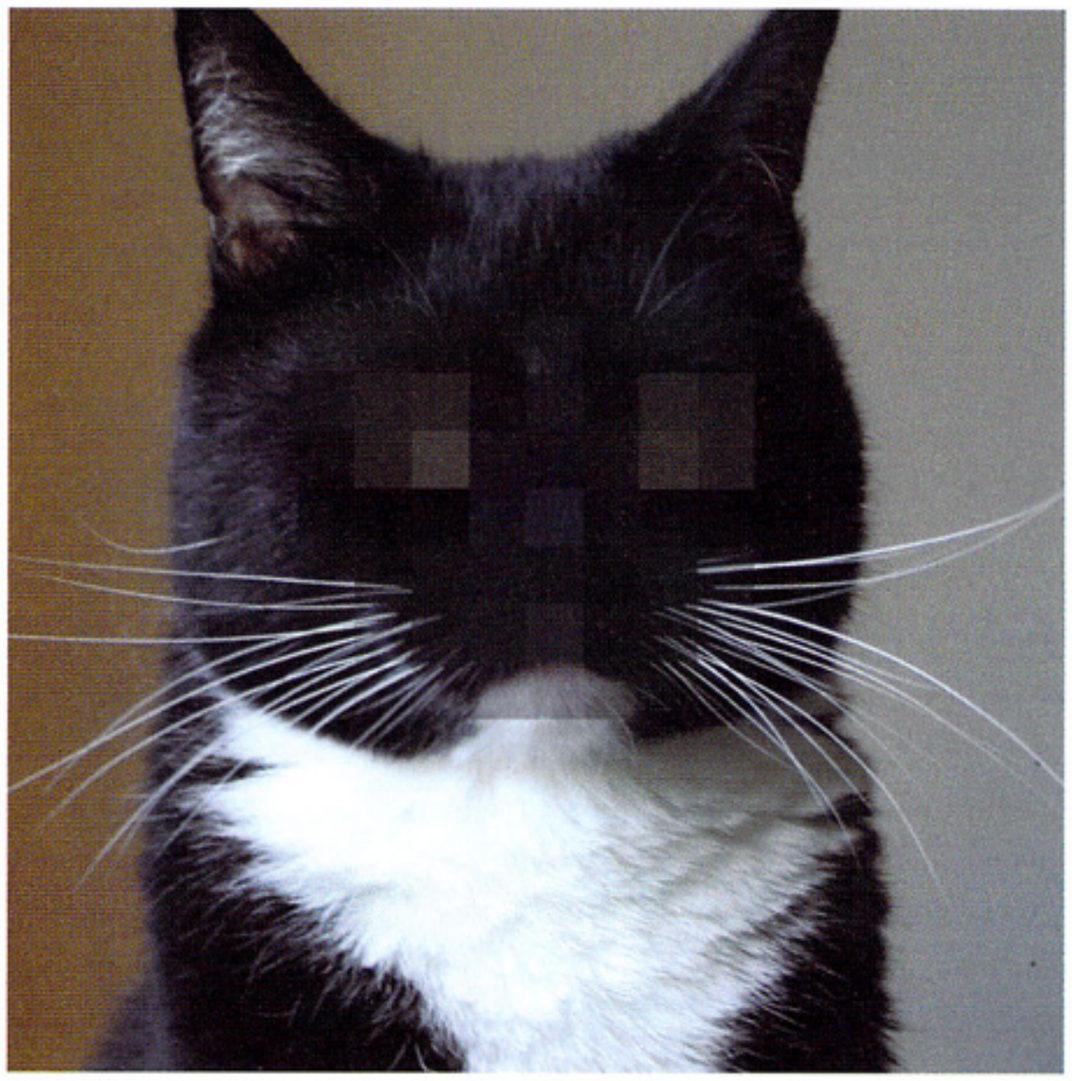
There are a few media companies in the US that were grand-

fathered by the FCC's cross-ownership restriction and allowed to keep their television, radio and newspaper assets. One such corporation is the Tribune Company, which owns television stations and newspapers in a number of major markets, including Chicago and Los Angeles, and was recently purchased by Sam Zell for $8.2 billion. But instead of Tribune immediately losing its grandfathered status and being forced to sell off some of its assets, FCC commissioners are trying to find a way for Zell to also receive an exemption. Tribune has already become famous for mastering the controversial art of convergence over the past two decades, cutting costs to the detriment of local reporting by using television and newspaper journalists in both mediums.

Although the FCC's own internal studies have shown that media consolidation hurts diversity, cuts out minorities from ownership and ignores local issues, the commission has suppressed these reports and continued to promote the convergence agenda instead. The FCC's structure is unique in that it has five commissioners appointed by government: three by the White House and two by the opposition. But instead of keeping each other in check on media issues, both parties have a history of promoting consolidation and ignoring public input. FCC commissioners are viewed as being corrupted by media companies since they have often accepted free flights and dinners from them and usually go on to work in the media industry when they leave the commission.

"They certainly haven't been [an effective watchdog]," says Craig Aaron, communications director with Free Press, a public advocacy group. "I think it's possible that the FCC could become an effective watchdog and certainly certain members of the FCC have started to take their job seriously by actually representing American people and not the big companies. But by and large the recent history of the FCC has been absolutely the opposite. At every turn they've tried to give more and more away to big media companies."

The next few months are crucial to the future of media democracy in Canada, America and Australia. Recently, there has been another major burst of consolidation activity that may see News Corp. take over the *Wall Street Journal* empire, Canada's Thompson Corp. buy Reuters, and Microsoft and Yahoo merge into some kind of online Frankenstein. The fact that the Australian government has already enacted laws that will allow the country's media landscape to be scrambled beyond recognition may mean it's too late, but the FCC and CRTC's public hearings give Americans and Canadians a real opportunity to voice their concerns about the dangers of media consolidation.



With major issues like the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and climate change still on the horizon, the public today, more than ever, needs a diverse media that can allow them to make informed decisions. But if a handful of corporations control the flow of information, they control the debate: blinded by short-term profits and bound by powerful lobbyists, they are content to leave the majority of people in the dark. A diverse media is crucial to a healthy and just society. The civil rights movement, women's suffrage and child labor laws were all changes brought about by renegade voices in the media, and it's precisely these kinds of voices that media consolidation is threatening to stifle. It's time for people to speak out against consolidation and demand their media watchdogs be strengthened, or else it may be time to put them down.



Klinenberg

As America's major media companies pressure the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to allow for more cross-ownership, Eric Klinenberg examines how media consolidation is suffocating democracy and even putting people's lives at risk in his latest book, *Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America's Media* (2007, Metropolitan Books).

An associate professor of sociology at New York University and native of Chicago, Klinenberg began to realize the dangers of a consolidated media when doing research on the 1995 Chicago heat wave for his previous book, *Heat Wave* (2002, University of Chicago Press). When more than 700 low-income seniors died from heat exhaustion in a short period of time, Klinenberg found that a stripped-down local media failed to properly cover the crisis. He spoke to Sean Condon from *Adbusters* from New York about the FCC's push for deeper media deregulation and how Americans are starting to push back.

SEAN CONDON: The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is currently looking at possibly loosening media ownership rules. Are they simply responding to the times or are we seeing something extraordinary?

ERIC KLINENBERG: This is the trend of our time. We're living through a moment where the philosophy of governance is changing from one in which states have a legitimate role in regulating corporations to promote the public interest to one in which powerful state actors relinquish control to the markets. The way that I characterize media policy is that it's being driven by a blind faith in the power of the market and new technology to give citizens the news and information they need. But the record shows this is far from the case. The United States has just gone through a decade of unprecedented consolidation in the media industry and citizens are actually pretty upset about what's happened to their local media.

Media consolidation is a very abstract concept. It's hard for some people to understand why one enormous conglomerate has dozens of subsidiaries that are themselves pretty damn big. It's dizzying to look at those media ownership charts. On the one hand, it's like an awesome display of power and on the other hand, it's hard to know what it means and how it affects our lives. But if you ask someone what has happened to your local radio stations, what has happened to your local newspaper, what do you think of the quality of your local television news programming, people will have a lot of [negative things] to say.

SC: What have the biggest consequences of media consolidation been?

EK: The United States, unlike most of the countries that it's normally compared to, has always had a far more corporate media system. But the key to making the system function was ensuring competition in local markets. We live in a time in which there's no question that there's enormous competition at the national and international market because of the internet, but in the local market consolidation has crushed competition. We have newspaper monopolies, radio oligopolies and cable monopolies, and the result is a diminished and degraded product and that's one of the reasons why I think the old media are in so much trouble today.

SC: Who is controlling the FCC's push for deregulation?

EK: The FCC is a captured agency – captured by the industry it's supposed to be regulating. We've seen the FCC cave in to demands from big media conglomerates on issues across the spectrum. It seems to me that the FCC has forgotten its public interest obligations. It acts as if its job is to promote the interests of a small number of giant corporations. Michael Powell, Colin Powell's son, was the chairman of the FCC during the first Bush administration and he literally said, "I can't regulate for the public interest because I don't know what the public interest means."

SC: Do you think the FCC is an effective watchdog?

EK: I think the FCC has been very ef-

fective at changing the rules of the media business to suit the interests of the world's largest communications companies. When the FCC wants to be effective, it can be. But I'm concerned that it pays too much attention to censoring speech in an arbitrary manner and not enough attention to promoting the public interest and maintaining quality journalism and diverse voices in the media.

•

One of the really striking things that happens when you have consolidation – when these large companies start taking over so much of the field – they inevitably buy out the small independently-operated minority and female owned stations too. In the last decade we've seen a dramatic decline in the number of minority and female owned broadcast stations, television and radio. In a time when politicians give lip service to the virtues of diversity, the polices that promote media consolidation are, in fact, crushing small independent, minority owned stations.

SC: The FCC tried to loosen media ownership rules before in 2003, but the courts turned it down. How determined are they to see these rules broken down?

EK: The FCC is a pretty interesting agency. It's extraordinary how much power this agency has, given how undemocratic it is. The way that it's constituted is that the sitting president gets to [pick three of the five commissioners]. So the Bush administration has made sure it's got three Republicans willing to advance the deregulatory agenda, which is why the FCC is pushing so hard again this year. But what surprised a lot of people was that the 1996 Telecommunications Act [which allowed for an unprecedented level of media consolidation] came under [Bill] Clinton and, in fact, the Democrats in the White House ended up being far more supportive of media consolidation than many people would have liked them to be.

•

But that was a different time, and today I think the Democrats get this issue and a lot of congressional Republicans see media consolidation as a no-win situation for the American public. Figures like Trent Lott and the National Rifle Association are concerned that media consolidation has meant a loss of local control for the communities where they serve. Even economic libertarians like William Safire, who is famously opposed to almost all regulation, got really upset about media consolidation because he thought deregulation had gone too far.

SC: The FCC is holding more public hearings this time around than it did in 2003. Do you think they're more aware of the problems with media consolidation?

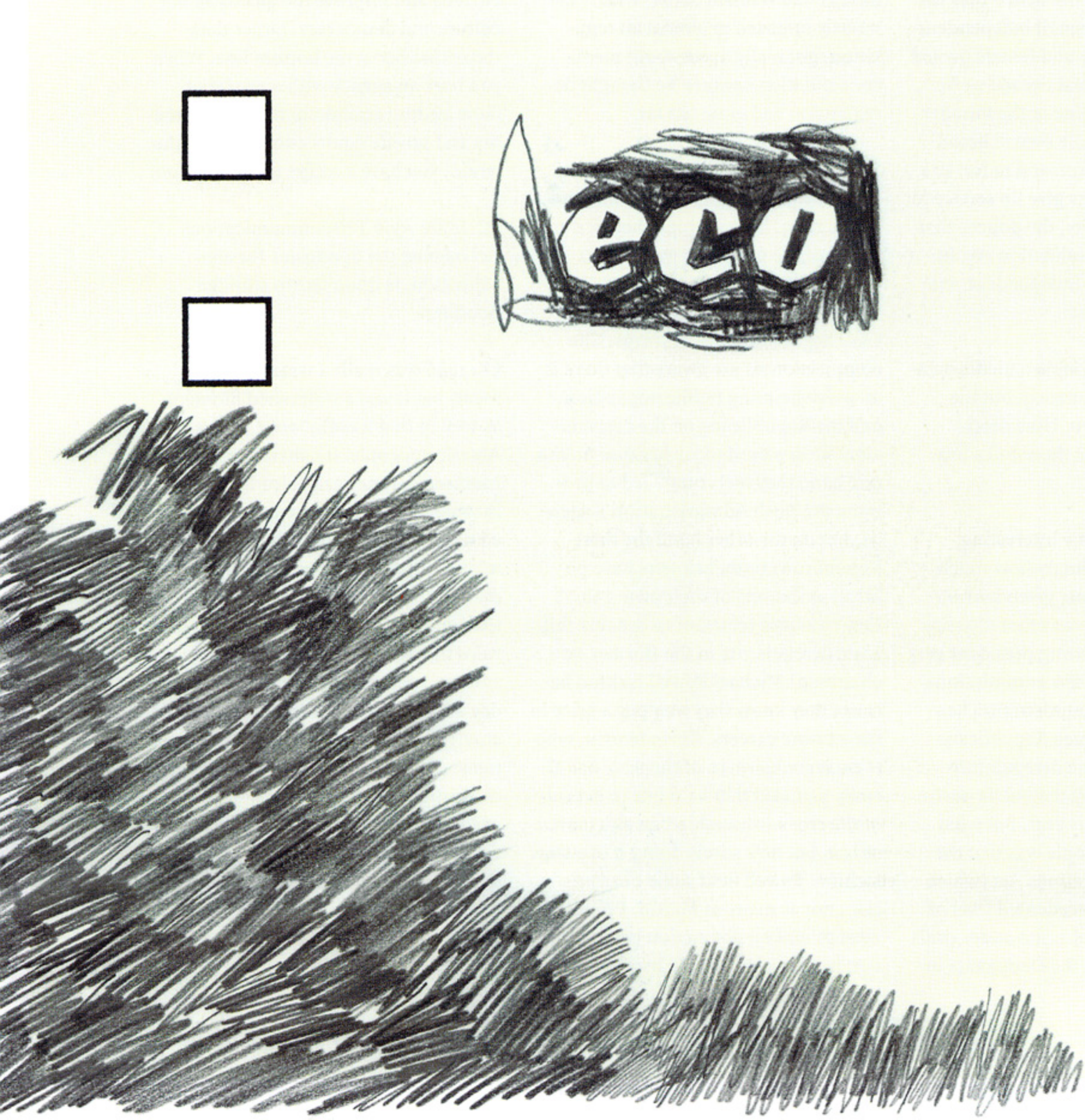
EK: They are holding hearings. The commissioners are aware that there is an overwhelming public opposition and the Republicans on the commission are in a bind today because on the one hand they feel compelled to promote the Bush Administration's agenda, but on the other hand the three Republican commissioners have political ambitions of their own. I think they're a little reluctant to become full-scale deregulators in the [former FCC chairman] Michael Powell fashion because they know they may pay a price in their future careers. Kevin Martin, who is current chairman of the FCC, has already signaled that he'd like to get rid of the cross-ownership ban as a matter of law, but he's surely doing it in a slow fashion. Powell held some hearings also, not as many as Martin. I think we need to make a distinction between an FCC hearing and an FCC listening. I'm not convinced that the Republicans on the FCC will actually listen to what Americans say at the hearings.

SC: One of the major complaints about the FCC is that its commissioners often end up taking jobs in the media industry. What sort of changes needs to happen within the FCC to make it a better watchdog?

EK: I think the FCC needs to revive its public interest commitment and commissioners should live up to their obligation to promote policies that serve citizens and improve the quality of our culture and democracy, rather than those that boost the bottom line. When you have an agency with a revolving door leading straight to the biggest media and private equity companies in the world, you have a recipe for corruption.

SC: If the 1996 Telecommunications Act opened the floodgates for consolidation, is it too late to stop the flooding?

EK: 1996 was really a watershed moment, but it was a watershed moment as well in that it really woke up the American people. It ushered in a new moment in American cultural politics in which the American citizens started to say, "media policy should be a matter of public policy" and began demanding that citizens begin to participate in the decision making about the rules that would change their media system. I compare the emergence of today's media reform movement to the emergence of the environmental movement 40 years ago. Today there are literally millions of Americans in all parts of the country on the left, on the right and everywhere in between who have decided that media reform is one of the most urgent issues in the country.


ECO



"A Wagtail " by Sesshu Toyo (1420–1506), a Zen Buddhist priest and master inkbrush painter. Renown for his innovative "flung ink" painting style, Sesshu captured spontaneous movements of animals and ephemeral scenes in nature in timeless paintings that continue to be celebrated today.

An act of aggression by the **rich** against the **poor**

As the planet heats up, precipitation patterns are shifting. Inconveniently for Africa, rainfall is heading away from the equatorial regions, toward the poles.

Africans only produce three percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Perhaps president Yoweri Museveni of Uganda is not so far off in calling climate change an act of aggression by the rich against the poor. According to a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report from November of last year, Africa is likely to be devastated by global warming. For example: 30 percent of coastal infrastructure is vulnerable to flooding. Twenty-five to 40 percent of species' habitat could be lost by 2085.

Uganda is not the only nation calling for the over-consuming West to own up to its share of the problem. According to China's submission to the IPCC, developed countries should formally recognize that they were responsible for 95 percent of greenhouse gas emission from the pre-industrial era to 1950, and 77 percent from 1950 to 2000.

According to the International Energy Agency, China will overtake the US as the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases by 2010. What China's critics are quick to overlook, is that China accounts for one fifth of the planet's population. China's 1.3 billion people can be expected to emit more than America's 300 million.

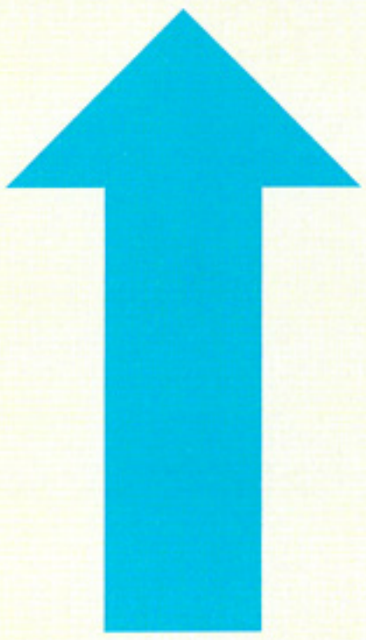
Western nations, especially in Europe, are calling on the world to unite in the battle against climate catastrophe. The world's developing countries, led by China, India and Brazil, are pointing out that the bulk of responsibility rests with those very same countries.

The fact that greenhouse gas emissions in the developing world are on the rise is a matter of great concern. We should not lose sight of the fact, however, that those emissions are being created to manufacture products that westerners consume.

The gases themselves know no geographical boundaries. It seems though that no matter where they originate, whether in the affluent West or in the developing world, it continues to be western appetite that is fueling the problem.

– Michael Hey

DOW

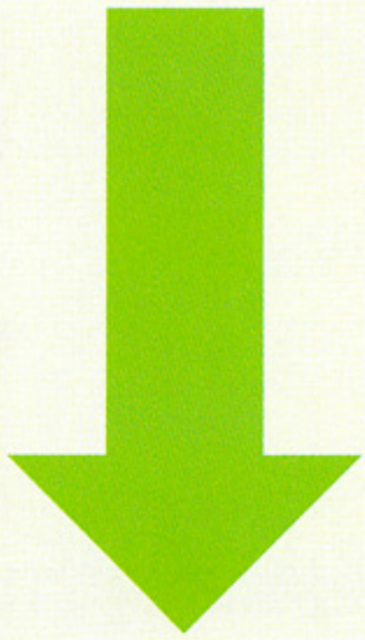


When the Dow Jones Industrial Average was first published in May of 1896, the index stood at 40.94. Much of the world was covered in lush old growth forest, the grand banks off Canada's eastern shores were teeming with cod and the Bubal Hartebeest still called this planet home. Henry Ford's Model T was still a decade away from transforming the way we get around.

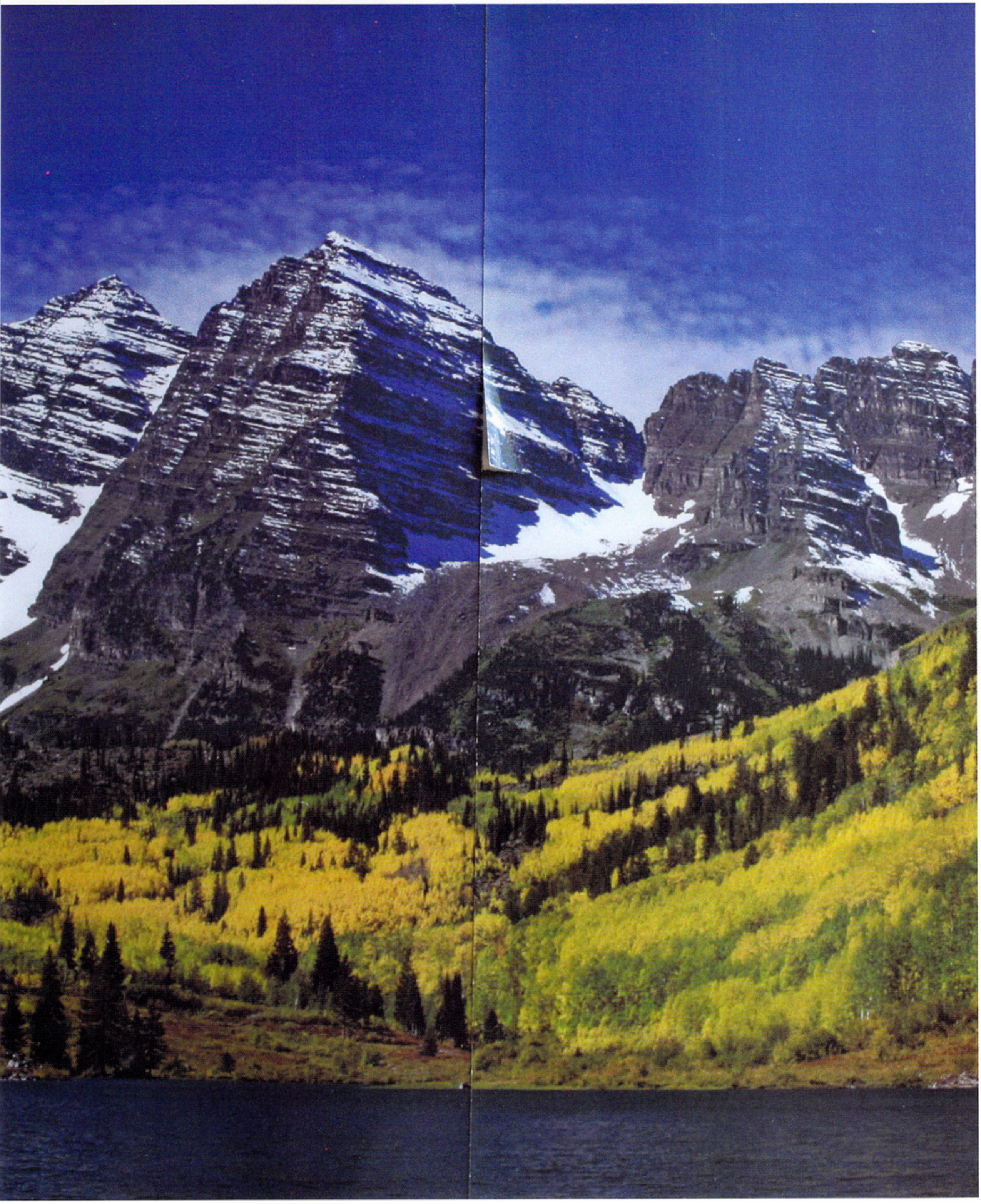
On May 7, 2007 the Dow closed at a record high of 13,312.97. The Amazon is on fire and the world's oceans have largely been drained of life. The Model T, and its offspring have altered the composition of the atmosphere to the point where global warming may soon send a million species to join the Bubal Hartebeest in extinction.

Shouldn't we be wondering why the stock market is experiencing its biggest bull run in 80 years, when the health of the planet is sinking to such dangerous lows? What is the Dow Jones really a measure of? Progress?

M.H.



EARTH



DISCONNECT
from the industrial food grid



BRIAN ULRICH

Consumers have ten times as many conversations

RECONNECT

with local food culture



BILDAGENTUR HUBER/LUBENOW/NEWSCOM

I was on my regular stroll through Toronto's beautiful Kensington market when a table not normally there was set up and strewn with jewelry. The people who sold them, male and female, wore long brown robes and shaved heads. A woman behind the table stood with a satisfied and knowing expression. She was beautiful; natural tanned skin and light eyes, her lack of make-up and shaved head seemed to bring out the best in her appearance.

I generally don't carry much money on me, so when I asked how much a wooden bracelet embedded with beads cost, I was disappointed in the answer. It wasn't so much that I wanted the bracelet, but more that I wanted to please this woman, this mysterious woman. The more I looked at her, the less I could place her race, her ethnicity, her nationality. I told her I had seven dollars. She sold me the ten dollar bracelet for six.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"The same place you're from."

I was blown away.

– *Andrea Werhun*

at farmers' markets as the do at supermarkets

Come on now
Back in the box
Stop kicking those legs
Quit making a fuss

Come on now
Stop stretching those arms
Stop looking around
You're thinking too much

Sit back and relax
Close your eyes tight
Back in the box
Safe, secure, and alright.

– Rick Sleutaris



New Mexico
Tim Barber



In a number of years
Nothing will be left
All swept away in the mists
And flames
Of generations of humans
Not concerned with the destruction of the planet
Caring only
For that next
SUV
That cold Biggie cream shake
"Give it to me Baby!"
we all scream,
and how

– *Christian Marks*



Thigh Cream
William Greiner

A Piece of Garbage

AFTER ATTEMPTING TO MEDITATE for three days under a blanket of noble silence in a traditional Japanese house in the suburbs of Osaka, my weary evening mind broke free of its thoughts and my final hour was still and pure. Recognizing the futility of desiring it further, I relished it nonetheless and felt elated by the cerebral cleanse. "Now I can sleep soundly," my mind delighted. As you have no other duties in a Buddhist meditative setting other than to quiet the mind and listen to your breath, I methodically made a cup of English tea before bed and enjoyed its milk and honey as an additional highlight of an arduous day. Now in bed, following two restless nights atop a thin, damp bunk with a cedar beam as a close bedfellow, I wriggled and smiled at the prospect of sleeping soundly as my roommate shut off the dim light of the lamp. And with eyes closed, breath soft and deliberate, I drifted away.

What greeted me in slumber was far more violent and real than anything I have ever encountered in "reality." This was a harsh and putrid landscape filled with scrapings and swill. A world of waste and rubbish, squander and ruin, fields upon fields of the left behind. Not only was the garbage around me, it was on top of me, heavy and greasy, as I slipped and stumbled attempting to escape it. I stopped wrestling the bags for a moment, pulled a wet diaper off my arm and faced what was before me. Cupping my hands over my mouth, I gazed at the bags upon bags of what my faceless dream companion informed me was "Japan's garbage." "This is Japan's garbage?" I inquired. "Yes, this is all of it, we estimate there's about 50 gazillion tonnes of garbage here, half of which are convenience store bento boxes and disposable chopsticks. And we're relieved that you've finally come to reconcile this mess. This garbage is your responsibility", and without another word my companion left me sick with worry in the rotting fields to unravel plastic bags from my ankles and determine my next step. Although I could grasp why it had degenerated to this point, I was desperate: what was I going to do about all of this? And moreover, I was infuriated that they had let it get like this!

"Seriously, JAPAN, why do you need so much stuff? WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY . . . ?" I screamed over and over as I struggled to remove the warm, soft grip of a banana peel from my shoulder and heard the whispered words, "Carmen, wake up. Carmen, sweetie, you're talking in your sleep . . . "

EARLIER THAT WEEK, upon watching a convenience store luncher tenaciously stuff his plastic bag into a very full garbage bin, a colleague and I pondered this society's demise: could it be intrinsic to the quantity and quality of its garbage? Could the picture of my dream wasteland be a crystal ball glance into the deep recesses of our collective consciousness illuminating a societal, emotional and/or spiritual void? Last April, after having spent a year accumulating a significant bundle of Japanese (albeit Chinese-manufactured) junk, I was moving back to Canada for an indefinite period and wanted to off-load this burden of loneliness I worked many hours to pay for. The second-hand shops only wanted "quality" stuff (after spending an hour sifting through my clothes, they took two pieces, weighed them and paid me the equivalent of $3). The city would take it for a hefty price or as some locals informed me, you could just find an empty lot and "dump it." I couldn't live with dumping it anonymously, but driving around burning gas trying to find somewhere to unload forced me to face my own consumption in a serious way. My abundantly-spaced Canadian mind felt ill-at-ease not being able to easily hide away my junk in a compact country. As I scrutinized my boxes of "stuff" I couldn't help but feel sick at the accumulation and embarrassed by my predicament: I wished I could just make it disappear. I recognized my frustration as being personal, local, and finally, global.

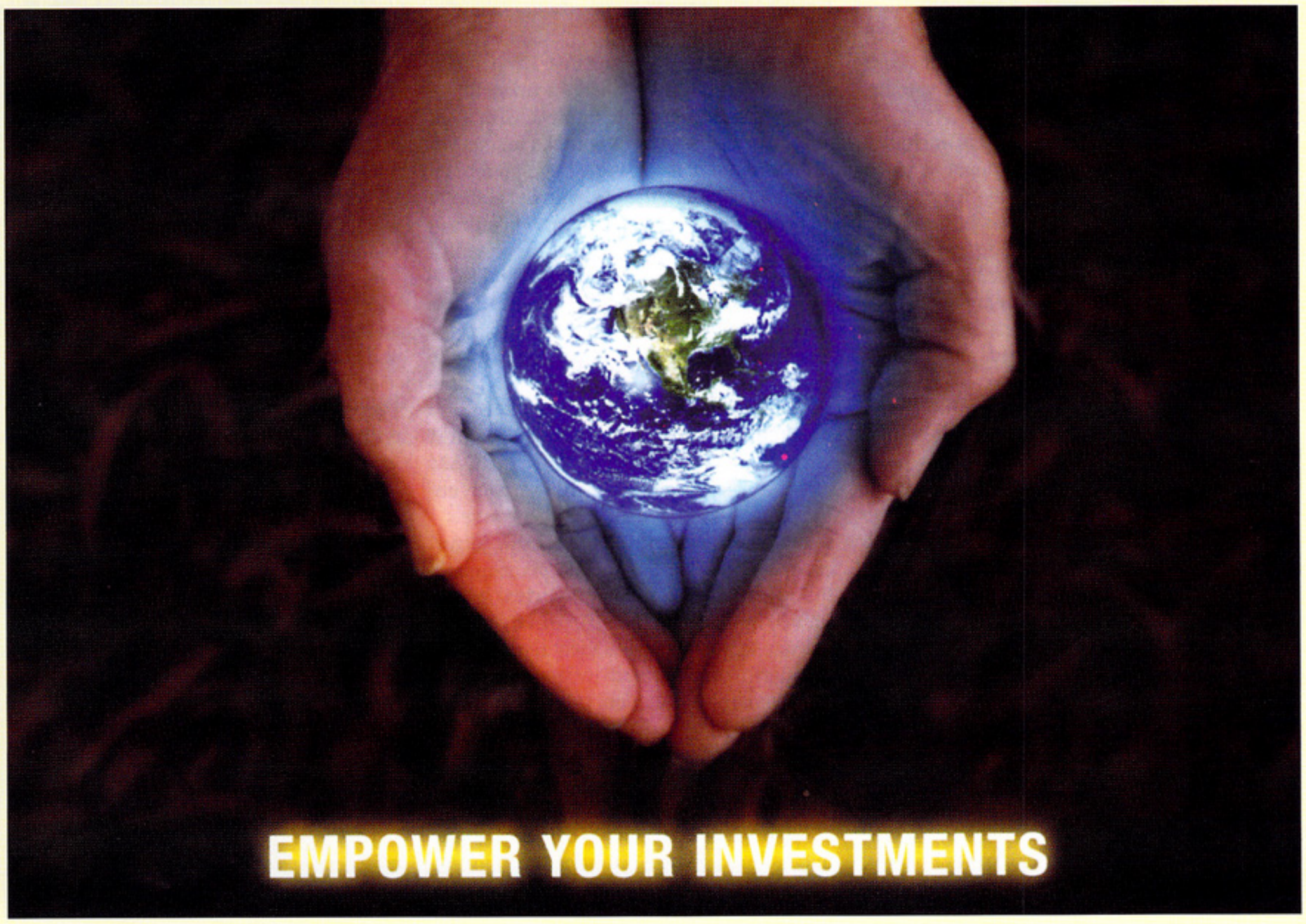
RECENTLY, I read an article about a new "plasma-arc gasification" facility planned for construction in a Florida county which has "plans to ditch its dump, generate electricity and help build roads – all by vaporizing garbage at temperatures hotter than parts of the sun." At first read, this facility seemed an ingenious alternative to the hopeless situation we currently face, but upon second consideration I was left asking why we continue to justify our consumption with grandiose schemes that merely perpetuate this insatiable amassing? Isn't the garbage merely a reflection of the real problem? And if we make it disappear, won't we keep finding new ways to create more? When will we start building a new way of thinking; a reasonable, moderate alternative to 1 000 000 degree Celsius heat vaporization? What about just living with less?

Just as I have to rigorously train my mind to be still, I also have to coerce it to need less, to want less, to buy less. This is not a task for I have been well-trained! But it is a worthy endeavour, and for every nightmare there is an inch of space which, in Japan, I realize is limited and perhaps futile to desire, but I will continue to relish it nonetheless. Tonight, in a soft bed, with only a few necessary items around me, I hope to sleep more soundly. — *Carmen King*

business as usual

☐

☐



After my father died – heart condition – I didn't take that much time off work. I was working casual hours in a retail job that a monkey could do, and not one of those smart monkeys who fly planes and stuff. Taking time off would mean not getting paid, and the idea of keeping myself busy in a difficult time had its appeal.

The hardest part was facing my manager. He had this frozen smile he wore in every situation, something he'd obviously learned in manager-school that overrode everything resembling an emotion. Angry customer? Frozen smile. Late employee? Frozen smile. Grief? Frozen smile.

– *Jody MacGregor*

Corporate Knights, Urbanization Issue 2007

business *unusual*

Authenticity in business works. Alignment around a shared and positive purpose is the absolute key to the difference between authentic and conventional business.

Authentic businesses have a purpose, which their customer, suppliers and staff can support and align themselves with. Typically, that purpose benefits society or the environment in some way such that those who do not stand to benefit directly and financially from the success of the business can still feel the desire to support its purpose. Authentic businesses flourish where conventional rivals flounder. Why is this? What enables their businesses to make a profit where others cannot? To grow where others shrink, to fly where others fall? And how might this apply to other businesses or organizations?

Typically, authentic businesses benefit from massively lower marketing and HR (staff turnover and sick days) costs than their conventional counterparts. Up to 80 percent and 91 percent respectively.

These benefits are supported by three key advantages.

• Better decision making as people are emotionally connected with what they do and can use their trust and intuition on the job.

• More motivation because the employees genuinely care about what they are doing.

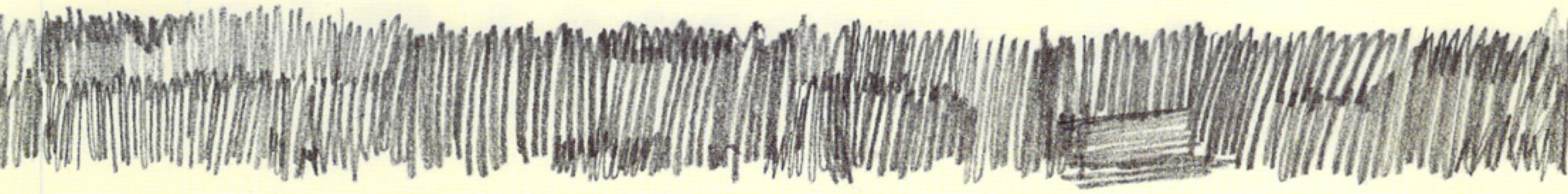
• Support from outside the company because other people also care about what the company is doing.

Are you proud of the final product that your work contributes? Are any of your values transgressed by the way your organization operates, both on a personal level (the way people are treated) and on a broader social/environmental level?

These days, there is really no need or excuse of any of us to do work that we are not proud of, or work that transgresses our values – and if none of us did, the world would be a much better place.

– Neil Crofts

www.authenticbusiness.co.uk



I remember my first pair of authentic Dr Marten's (the shoe with the bouncing sole). When I ripped them out of their box to start breaking them in, I noticed an advertising flyer in the bottom of the box that read 'if you walk a mile in another man's shoes you will understand his pain. If you walk a mile in another man's doc martin's, you will never give them back.'

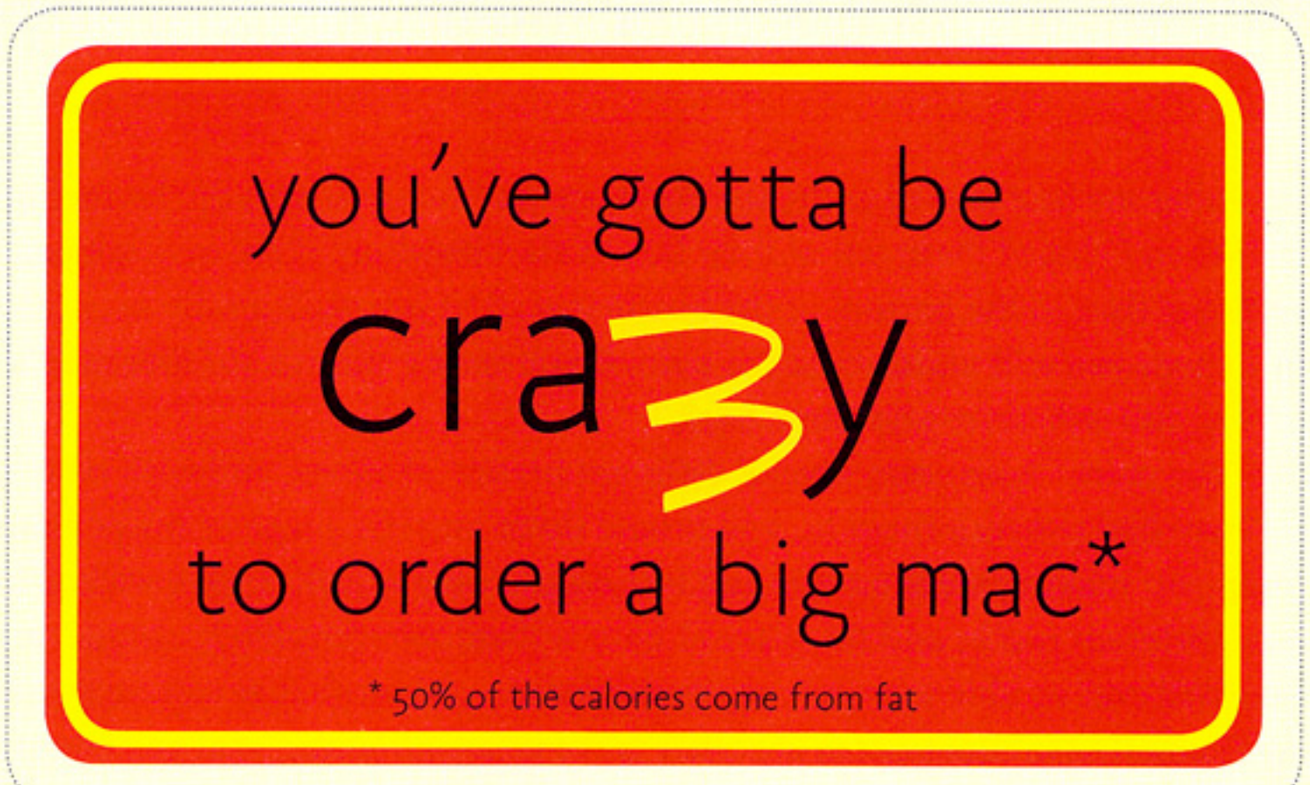
Over the years I have worn several different brands of shoes, and with every new pair I have had to break them in, and mould them into the shape of my personal footprint, making them unique and intrinsic to only myself. I have walked in several different places and the places I have walked are completely unique, and no one will ever be able to mimic my experiences – although they can wear the same shoes. These experiences are what make us all authentic, real and completely unique; they have become inseparable to our own personal identities, because it is our opinions, beliefs, values, emotions, feelings, and experiences that make us who we are. Our identities are the only thing left that is truly authentic.

Our inner soul (I use the term soul to mean our emotional and psychological attributes, rather than an attempt to spark debate about the existence of the human soul) is no longer what matters to the consumer culture. We already have two branded soles on our feet, why would we need another that takes time understand? By electing to wear a pair of Dr. Martens I was attaching that brand to my physical identity. Since then I have associated with scores of objects that have been scrutinised and judged by other individuals. Our physical appearances are always on trial, and our external identities are based upon our relationship with objects, brands, and the symbols that they emanate. In this contemporary world everything is consumed quickly: objects, information, images, attitudes, the general ethos of society; we all expect things to happen now. There is no longer time to walk a mile in another person's shoes and truly discover their soul brand, because the only soul that matters in the consumer world is the brand name on our sole.

– Vikki Miller

THE NUMBER OF TIMES A YEAR YOU GO TO

McDONALD'S



IS A MEASURE OF HOW BALANCED

(OR UNBALANCED)

YOUR LIFE

HAS BECOME.

Check out the op-ed page of *The New York Times*. See the quarter-page ads on the bottom corner? This is considered one of the most politically effective ad spaces in the English-speaking world. It costs around $52,000. If we were to run with a version of the ad on the facing page, or a version of the ad on the back cover, do you think that quarter-page would be worth the expense? Or do you think our money is better spent in the pages of *Mother Jones*? Or the *The Guardian*? Or are the ad concepts better suited to an online campaign? Or do the ads just need a major overhaul? Join the discussion at <memewarriors.org>.



Life Lessons

Tell your your children, "we're going to McDonald's!"

As you approach, ask them to take in a deep breath. What's that smell, and what does it signify?

Go inside, ask for a copy of the nutritional booklet, and see if your children can figure out how much fat is in a Big Mac. Nearly 50 percent of the calories in a Big Mac comes from fat! Explain what that means: a life of obesity, illness and maybe an early death.

Point to the shiny plastic clown and ask your children: What's he up to? And what are all the toys and the playground all about?

Back at home, teach your children to savor real food. Bask in the aroma of a fresh loaf of bread, or the burst of flavor from a ripe tomato.

Teach your children well.

"I WANT TO BRING THE NIKE CORPORATION TO ITS KNEES"

For a decade now, Jim Keady has been trying to kick Nike's ass using their shoes as ammo. The former professional soccer player's crusade against the apparel titan began when he was canned from a coaching gig at St. John's University for refusing to wear Nike's products, as required by the school's $3.5 million endorsement deal – a stand he took after learning what was happening in overseas sweatshops while researching his masters thesis. Accompanied by his professional and personal partner, Leslie Kretzu, he famously tried to shed light on the issue by living on $1.25 US per day for a month amongst Nike factory workers in Tangerang, Indonesia, in 2000.

In the interim, however, Nike has recast its malevolence by trumpeting corporate social responsibility and pledging to monitor for improprieties in its subcontracted factories around the third world. But concrete proof of improvements has been elusive. "They shifted the debate onto monitoring to obscure the need to talk about wages and trade unions," explains Keady. "And that's what we've got to get it back to."

In April, Keady's Educating for Justice (educatingforjustice.org) – which, among other activist efforts, gives multimedia presentations about the sweatshop issue to about 50 US schools annually – sent a letter to Nike asking them to publicly disclose the alleged living wages they pay their factory workers (read it here: myspace.com/behindtheswoosh), as well as encouraged students to do the same. By May, some students had received letters from Nike's VP of Corporate Responsibility that outlined their intended policies and the blue sky-scope of their operation's monitoring efforts, but failed to answer their request for cold, hard facts that would, as Keady wrote in his letter, allow "consumers and investors to eliminate any potential information asymmetry that may currently exist in the marketplace." Given past reactions to his attempts at diplomacy, Keady was doubtful he'd even get the same non-response.

"Nike has a $1.63 billion marketing and advertising budget; they've got the best ad firms and public relations films in the world," says Keady. "So, when you've got that kind of money you can craft any kind of message you want, and anybody that studies marketing or public relations knows that even if something is a lie, if you say it long enough and passionately enough to enough people, it's going to start being believed as the truth. Which is what Nike's done – they've lied to the consuming public for years."

– *Eric Rumble*

Starbury Shoes – A Real Alternative?

How much do you have to pay to wrap your soles in soul? Pro basketball player Stephon Marbury has opened a new bidding war at $15 – the cost of his contentious sneaker and apparel line, the Starbury, which he debuted last August through discount retailer Steve & Barry's. Given the evident popularity of the label – it's being expanded from 50 products to 200, and another elite player, Ben Wallace, recently signed on to the concept – it would seem that Marbury's aim to create a stylish, affordable, quality athletic shoe (with legit cache) for kids who live below the poverty line is a slam dunk in both branding and social justice circles.

But as much as Marbury deserves respect for the alturistic effort (which builds on previous, somewhat higher-priced attempts by fellow ballers Shaquille O'Neal and Hakeem Olajuwon), the back-story behind the shoe's production remains as tightly stitched up as that of the majors. Just as Starbury shoes are designed by the same firm that develops footwear for Nike, Reebok and Converse, the product itself is also made in China – the main difference on this side of the pond being that there are no $70-million endorsement deals (à la LeBron James) to inflate the retail price beyond reason.

If Marbury were truly trying to revolutionize the shoe industry for the better, the sweatshop workers in China would be just as important to the equation as the poor kids in the American projects for whom he's putting his foot down.

E.R.

The Blackspot isn't a product. It's an open-source brand. It belongs to everybody who believes in a culture made by real people, not anti-social corporations. There's no copyright, so take it and use it. You'll be a completely new kind of entrepreneur, part of a movement of business-minded social activists determined to do capitalism the right way, the ethical way, the human way.

antipreneur.org

blackspotshoes.org

BEFORE CHOSING A BRAND,

MORE AND MORE

CONSUMERS ARE ASKING

CRITICAL *QUESTIONS.*

"What are the politics behind this brand? How does it promote the values that I believe in? What does this brand really stand for?"

THE ANSWER,

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, IS

"Nothing . . . This brand stands for ***nothing!"***

Tell them what you stand for!



Download this sticker at adbusters.org. Put it in a place of pride right next to the Visa and Mastercard logos.

Blackspot Café Opens in Edmonton



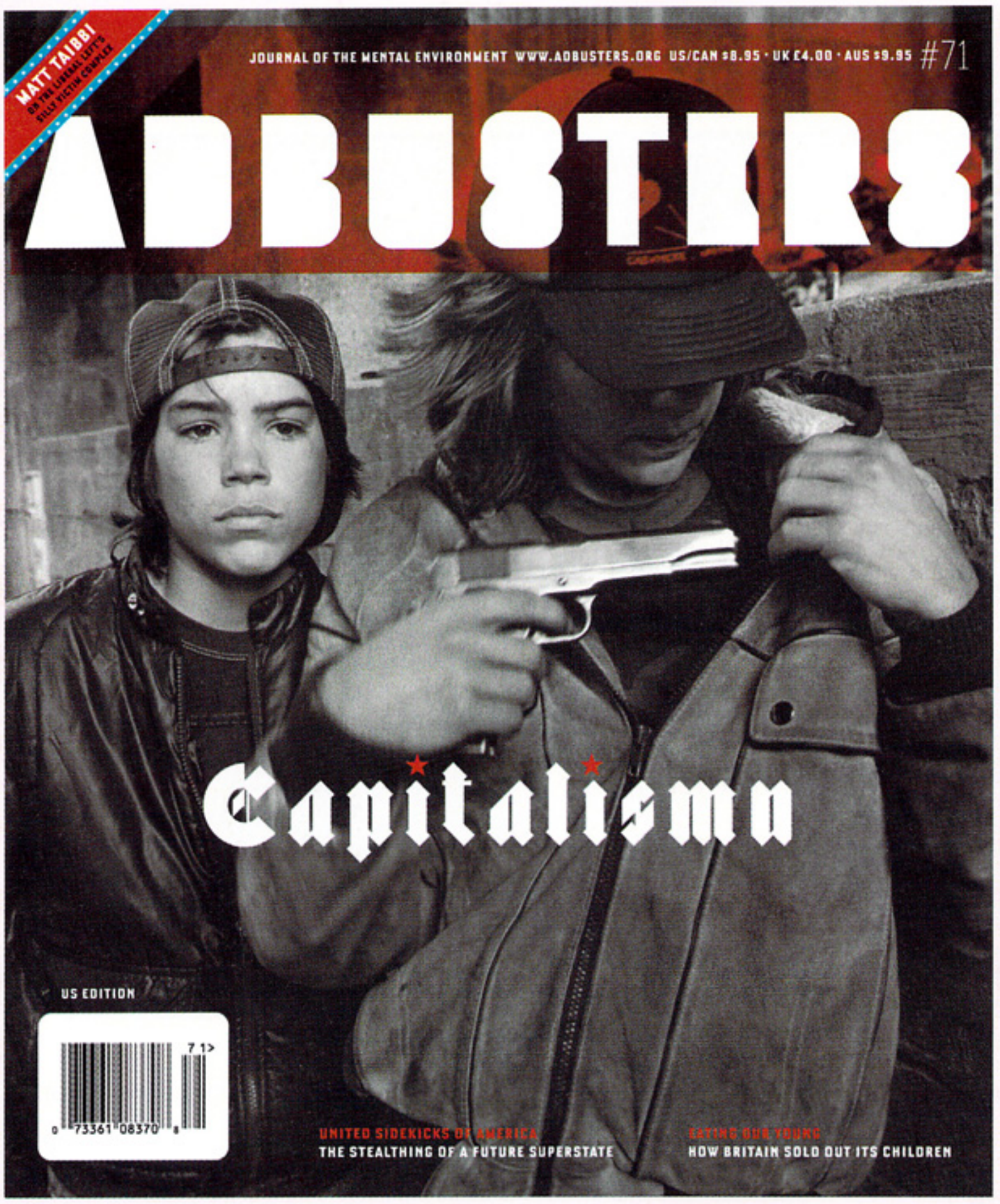
You won't find any TV sets or hockey nights at the Blackspot Café in Edmonton, Canada. With its focus on showcasing live music, it has opened at just the right time when two of the city's main music venues have recently closed and three others have temporarily shut down.

Motivated to help the city's music community, founders David Black, Lain Hacienda and Sebastien Savard plan to use proceeds from the member-run non-profit towards a music co-op that will offer band management, design, and tour booking services. "The biggest thing we would like to do is not to promote names, but to create them," says Black. "We're banking on the idea that people will appreciate new things, unique genres that are high quality or a little bit more obscure . . . not just radio rock."

The café is the first Blackspot in North America and functions as a wireless lounge, has a collection of books and magazines, and serves only organic, natural or fair trade beverages and food. If the interest and support for independent artists is as high as expected, the Blackspot aims to move to a more central location and to replace the now-closed Sidetrack Café as the place to hear live music in Edmonton. Eventually, Black would like to see the café also focus on the national art and music scene and to host CBC Radio 3.

For now though, Black feels the need for the Blackspot Café to remain in Edmonton and "create recognition for local and touring groups," theorizing that the suffering of his community's live music scene has been caused by the buyout of local bars and by music promoters moving to cities where the industry is more robust. Let's place our bets that the Blackspot Café's creative antipreneurship will help bring the city's music scene back to good health.

– Mary Edwards



Matt Taibbi's "The American Left's Silly Victim Complex" [*Adbusters #71*] is perhaps the most idiotic essay I have ever seen in print. It reads like an article from, well, *Rolling Stone*, complete with requisite references to *Girls Gone Wild* and The Beastie Boys and a knack for adolescent name-calling.

To summarize, Taibbi argues that the left is "too inclusive," and needs to focus on "goals, not people." He goes on to note that "the real problem [with the American left] is that they don't have a legend?" What is this, *Spiderman 4*? And finally, he believes leftists should call themselves "progressives," as if that would make some kind of difference.

I am afraid Taibbi has confused liberals with Democrats. It is true that the pseudo-liberals in the Democratic Party have sold out to big business and that their policy elites have little contact with working class Americans. The pseudo-conservatives in the Republican Party share this sad state. It is not as if the CEOs and the Heritage Foundation have anything in common with the rural, poor and working class-whites, whom they dupe each election with hollow moralistic planks which they never deliver on. Both major parties have pimped out the American people to the highest bidder. Is it any wonder that so many Americans are disillusioned with this puppet show?

Real liberals (like those in the Green Party of the United States) fight for grass-roots democracy, refuse to take corporate donations, believe in true cost economics and will defend the rights and freedoms of citizens. Likewise, true conservatives (like those in the National Libertarian Party) also believe in protecting citizens' rights against government oppression, as well as fiscal responsibility and a government that answers to the people. Unfortunately, there is no place for those who believe in democracy and popular sovereignty in modern American electoral politics.

Arguments about semantics ("liberal" versus "progressive") and "finding a legend" are meant to entertain, not elucidate, and I for one believe there is too much entertainment in American government already.

Nicholas Triplett
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

A few months ago – all last year, in fact – I would have echoed the critical letters in *Adbusters #71*. No longer. #71 was brilliant. This was how good it was: I actually shared the magazine, as opposed to merely enduring it. Provocative without being exasperating, expansive coverage, thoughtful, and a surprising mix of writers – you nailed our global consumer culture (with people as our most disposable commodity). Your endless Israel-bashing, North America as the axiom of evil, the typical West Coast whininess – all of that was transformed, for once, with an impressively wide survey and multiplicity of writing styles. The China pieces alone were fantastic.

If you can keep up with the likes of #71, you should have no shortage of content – and faithful readers like me – for years to come. Reversing my original intentions, I will be renewing my subscription shortly, and for two years.

Shaffin Shariff
Lakeville, Connecticut, USA

The picture with the shampoo ad on the children's playground in *Adbusters #71* is a not so obviously fake. Until you notice where the sunlight is coming from and casting shadows to.

Is it on purpose that you don't tell the reader? Are the other "news" items also fake?

Michael Rosewich
Zürich, Switzerland



Le Bébés Domestique was a one-day London performance by a young French sculptor, Prune. She embarked on the project in response to reports that British scientists are looking to create human-animal hybrid embryos for research purposes. <prune-art.com>

[Sharp eye. We don't have a lot of details about that reader-submitted set of images, but the one you mention is indeed a mocked-up ad concept rather than a on-site photo. The captions were omitted in error. — Eds.]

AUTHENTICITY

G'day from the land down under. Egalitarian. Multicultural. Weird animals. Deadly snakes. And spiders. Steve Irwin and crocodiles. Or stingrays. That Russell Crowe bloke. Hot and dry, a drought in our heart. Agriculture. Wheat and the AWB in Iraq. Kickbacks to some bad guy. Pink and sheep. Trade. Uranium and coal exporter. Kyoto hell no. An American ally. Neo-liberal. Adore that free market economy. Big business prioritized. Workers raped at the front. Increasingly centralist and interventionist government. Race riots by the seaside. Marginalized minorities. Detention centers. Tight immigration policy. Fear and loathing under blue skies. An Authentic Australia?

Emma Lawler
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Hung on the illegal apartheid wall adjacent to the Bethlehem-Jerusalem checkpoint terminal, a 25-foot banner smirks "May Peace Be With You."

Inside, an Israeli soldier walks above Palestinian heads on a metal catwalk, his finger itching the trigger of his M16. Fluorescent lights buzz and echo through the stark walls of this terminal. People wait their turns through the narrow turnstile at the whim of the soldier on the other side of bulletproof glass. It's quiet and bare, like a sanitized clinic.

I wait in line behind a young Palestinian father and his five-year-old daughter, a striking little girl with long, chestnut hair that hangs in a single, perfect braid down to her waist. She has on new clothes; jeans with red stitching and a matching denim jacket that covers a pink blouse. New boots with silver zippers. A thin black and silver belt. The Israeli soldier is barking at them in Hebrew. "Take off your shoes," the sol-

Adbusters 72

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dier yells through the crack of the loudspeaker. The girl looks at her father, bending down to unzip her boots. The girl moans quietly. "*La, babo, la.* (No, Dad, no.)"

"Take off your belt," shouts the soldier. The father leans against the x-ray machine and takes off his belt. "Take hers off too."

The girl understands this. "*La, bid-deysh.* (No, I don't want to)," says the girl. Her eyes are glued to the floor. The father kneels on one leg, slowly, carefully unbuckles his daughter's belt. I am watching this unfold. "*Babo,*" whispers the little girl, "Don't let them take anything else from me."

Nora Barrows-Friedman
Berkeley, California, USA

There are many ways to live and work in Hawai'i, only some of which involve perpetuating the tourist illusion of island exoticism. The US is repositioning Hawai'i as a strategic forward base in its "global war on terror," especially as it vies for Pacific dominance against rivals China and North Korea. The military now occupies nearly 25 percent of the land on the most populated island of O'ahu, all of which was stolen in 1893 when wealthy sugar barons overthrew the sovereign kingdom. While the military-industrial complex plans further expansions across ancestral homelands, Hawaiians continue to struggle under a colonial rule that combines militant domination with a candy coating of consumer fetishism that disregards authentic Hawaiian culture for a cartoonized version of island realities. The Army is in the process of snatching up an additional 234,000 acres of land on O'ahu to station and train a brigade of 20-ton Stryker armored attack vehicles. Meanwhile, the Navy is pushing to make the University of Hawai'i at Manoa a "University Affiliated Research Center," a move that would allow the Navy to classify university research and make UHM complicit in the military's continued occupation of Pacific nations. From the missile defense shield on Kaua'i to the chemical munitions polluting the Wai'anae Coast, sacred sites and fragile ecosystems continue to be exploited in the name of national security, ironically in a nation that never intended to become a part of the US.

Jon Schmitz
Honolulu, Hawai'i, USA

TV TURNOFF WEEK

For two and a half years, I haven't watched television. I gave my television set back to my mother. It's such a relief! I think it is one of the best decisions I have ever made. Now I have plenty of time to visit friends, read books, learn strange languages. And when I want to be informed I read a newspaper or a news website. When I want to be entertained I visit friends or whatever comes up in my mind. I just try to be creative. Television is unnecessary and needless.

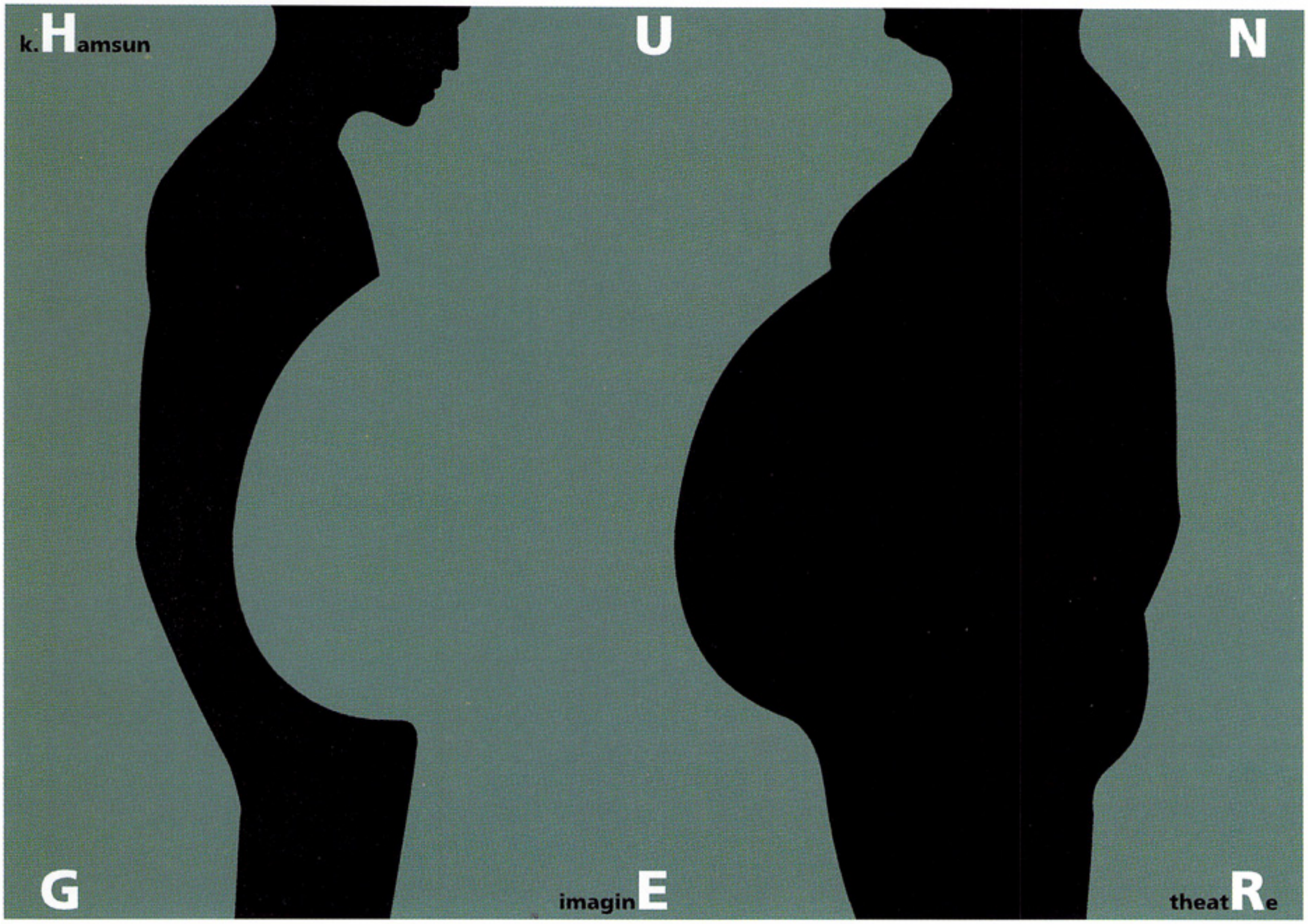
You asked in your newsletter how we will celebrate TV Turnoff Week. Well, I don't celebrate it at all. People celebrate special moments in life like Christmas, a birthday and so on. The fact that I decided to enjoy life, to visit friends more, to learn more strange languages is not special to me. It's completely normal and as far as I know people don't celebrate normal things. On the other hand, it's the small things in life that count. It's very important to realize that. Every single day I realize that my life is so much richer without a television set. I guess that's my "celebration."

Sander Ruijsbroek
The Netherlands

I don't even own a TV. I think that you should take it a step further and have a "Turn-Off the Internet Week." That would truly be revolutionary. Because, seriously, getting rid of your TV was so two years ago.

Melanie Ahlf
via email

I wanted to let you know some of the things my wife and I will be doing during TV Turnoff Week. We'll be playing *way* more Scrabble. Couples cooking. Camping out in our back yard. Having



Lex Drewinski
Hunger, 1999

more sex. And generally being happier, more productive people. Thanks!

anonymous
via email

ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES

After reading "Does the Israeli Tail Wag American Dog?" by Kathleen and Bill Christinson [*Adbusters* #70], it's hard to escape the conclusion that the debate about Israel is marked by two opposite but equally troubling extremes.

One extreme is discussed in the article. According to the authors, there are those who react to any criticism of the Jewish state by crying anti-Semitism.

The other extreme is represented by the article itself. The authors react to any defense of Israel, or any rebuttal of Israel's detractors, by exclaiming that the "Israel lobby" is at work to silence debate. Never mind that there are shades of grey, that Israel has legitimate security concerns, and that the Palestinians have responsibility to reform.

The authors want you to believe that there has been no legitimate criticism of Walt and Mearsheimer's paper or Jimmy Carter's book. In fact, our website has detailed, fact-based rebuttals of many of the claims central to Walt, Mearsheimer and Carter's theses.

Sure, you could dismiss our rebuttals by calling us part of the "Israel lobby." But how is that any different than dismissing critics of Israel by calling them anti-Semites?

Gilead Ini
Senior Research Analyst, Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

I saw your mag yesterday with an image of the Israeli flag on a dog's butt. [*Adbusters* #70]. The general impression I got is this: "There are problems. Blame society and blame the Jews."

You might want to chill out a little bit. The alienated, isolated and depressed could use some help, but anti-social Jew-hating is not helping anybody.

I would only hope that you check out var-

Hi, *Adbusters*.

As a journo and uni student, I'm beginning to involve myself very heavily in researching a new direction for positive cultural change. The question: How can we stop feeling completely helpless? Because there's only so much billboard jamming we can do before we just give up. I think we already reached that point five or so years ago, maybe 20 years ago. That tactic can never take us anywhere.

My strongest belief from my research is that activists have to colonize new media landscapes before big business can. This seems obvious, but it isn't working that way in the real world. The weakest point in corporations is their involvement with new media. All new media outlets evolve in order to promote freedom of information, and are subverted by corporations (MTV is floundering online, there's the question of how to "monetise" MySpace and YouTube, etc.). This is where jammers need to jump in and put a spanner in the works!

My idea builds upon your "Blackspot" foundation. What if we could make sharing cool? It's a revolutionary idea.

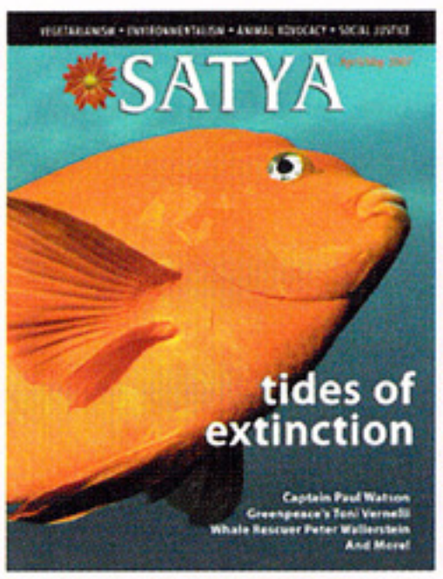
The idea: A web 2.0 community that allows for the sharing of physical goods in a marketing-free environment. I'm thinking books, DVDs, electronic equipment. This has the potential (with significant nurturing) to turn entire cities into large libraries: each house would simply act as another "wing." Upon joining, you list the possessions you are willing to "loan" and create a "wishlist" of the items you would like to borrow. If someone in your "radius" has that item, you organize a meeting.

There's no reason why this cannot work. There are safety concerns, but there are very simple ways to work around these. Legally, I can find nothing wrong with providing an environment that allows one to share (but not copy) goods.

At first, this may seem like a silly proposition. "Isn't this Freecycle?" you might ask. I would reply "No!" (how concise!). Freecycle is an attempt to bring old media (classified ads) into a new media environment. It is a way for people to give away old junk that no one would ever want to pay for. It doesn't work. The idea I have in mind uses a P2P model to push the other way, from the virtual back to the real. It is about lending people things they actually want (thus jamming our throw-away consumer culture). And I'm willing to bet it could work very well. Think about the impact Napster and P2P clients had in jamming the music industry. By forcing a meaningful collision between the real and virtual, it could be possible to get something similar occurring in the way we transfer real goods.

Yours sincerely,
Connor O'Brien

The End of *Satya*



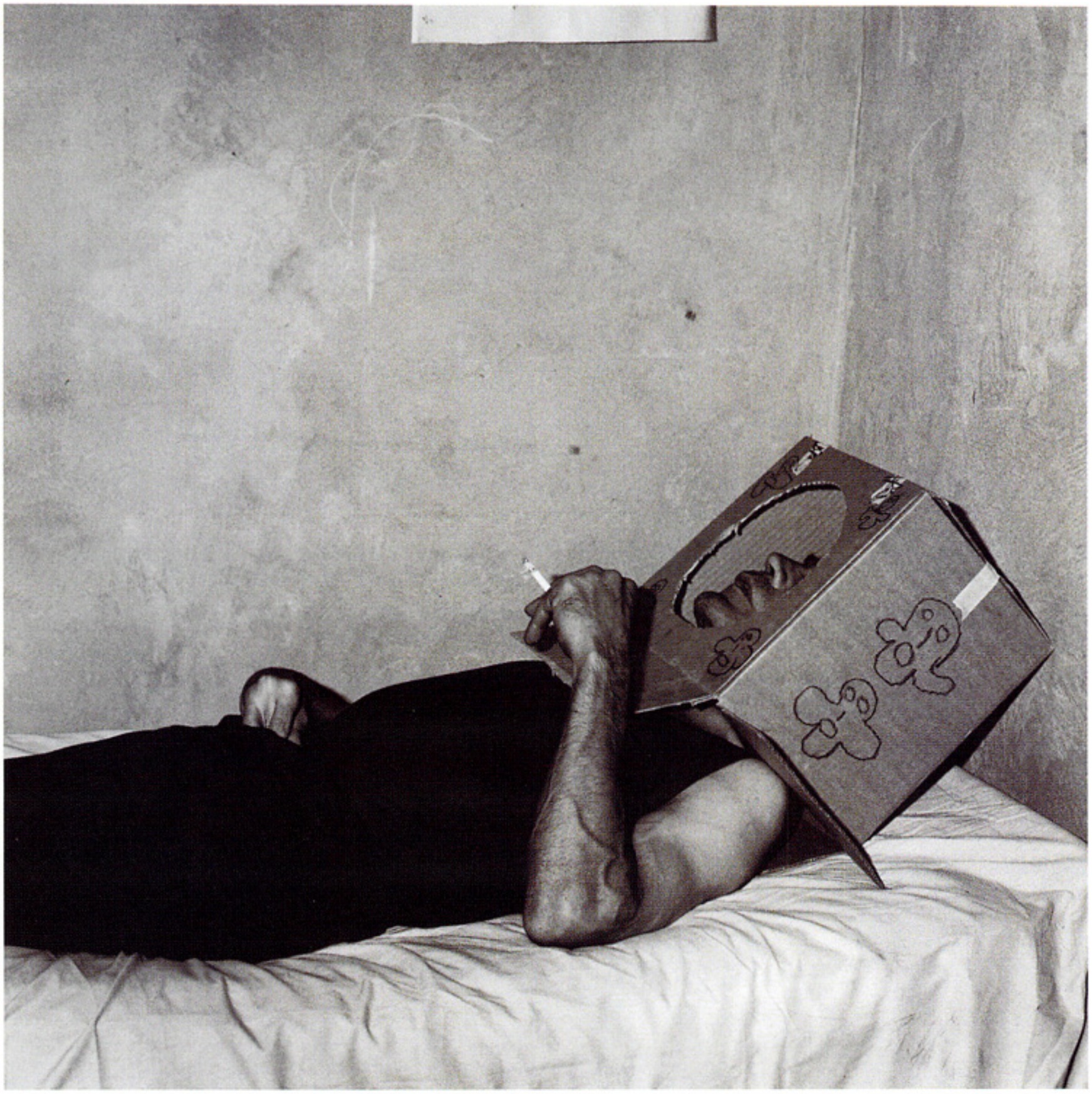
Satya, the magazine that originally started as an animal advocacy forum, is publishing its last issue this summer. Over the course of 13 years, it has developed to encompass broader social issues and topics related to vegetarianism, environmentalism, animal advocacy and social justice. With every issue dedicated to a comprehensive examination of topics ranging from marine extinction to the changing face of terrorism, alongside interviews with change-making activists, the magazine has taken a courageous and critical look that goes beyond first impressions. By bringing to light aspects of issues not seen in the mainstream media – such as a how-to guide on supporting political prisoners – *Satya* has pushed boundaries on issues without regard for whether or not they are currently in vogue.

Publisher Beth Gould says ending the publication was "a personal decision." Gould has seen interest increase during the magine's lifespan, and notes that "people are now more connected and knowledgeable, yet are mitigated by the much bigger political challenge."

Gould's decision was a blow to many activists and long-time supporters. New York activist Patrick Kwan wrote on <supervegan.com>, "It's hard for me to imagine NYC without *Satya*. For as along as I've been vegan and an activist, *Satya* has been there. *Satya* has always served as the leading forum for contentious and thought-provoking issues in the animal rights and vegetarian movements while serving as a great independent news source for New Yorkers and beyond on everything from tasty vegan treats to in-depth examinations of social justice issues."

Although the website will be maintained and all articles will soon be archived and accessible online, the end of *Satya* is an unfortunate loss for activists looking for independent media with which to face critical global issues.

Mary Edwards



Roger Ballen
Recluse, 2002

Image courtesy
Clint Roenisch
Gallery, Toronto

---

ious neo-nazi websites and see if any of those misguided youths find inspiration from your magazine. Then you will, hopefully, understand that you have gone too far. (Or maybe you think you are not responsible for where your words end up?)

Don Bright
via email

THE 9/11 TRUTH MOVEMENT

I personally loved *Adbusters* #70, save for the small article, "September 11 Conspiracy," by Michael Hey. I had recently read on George Monbiot's two articles regarding 9/11 conspiracies, "Short Changed" and "Bayoneting a Scarecrow." Monbiot's opinion is that these conspiracy theories take the public's attention away from real issues such as climate change and stopping the Iraq War. They make the government seem omnipotent, and cause a lot of people to feel weak and powerless when compared to it.

I tend to agree with Monbiot. If we keep spending time trying to find a conspiracy behind events such as 9/11 or Pearl Harbour, we will stop caring about current issues that we can and should change, because we will think the government holds all the cards.

9/11 happened and finding a conspiracy behind it will not undo what happened, so it is best if we focus our energies on our present and future and work on the real issues at hand. We can stop events like 9/11 from happening by taking our power back and doing something to change the way our country is run.

Patrick Ignoto
via email

Upon picking up *Adbusters* #70, my husband and I were pleasantly suprised to see a small inclusion on 9/11.

We have to admit we never gave much thought to whether or not 9/11 unfolded as reported, until my cousin's husband insisted on showing us the bin Laden "confession



Hi,
This Diesel ad appeared in the April issue of L.A. Confidential.
It seems to be saying "fuck global warming. I'll ride it our on my yacht."
Wayne Kennan
Los Angeles, California, USA



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clip" after lunch one day. It's clearly a fake when placed side by side with the actual image of bin Laden.

Looking back, we just took for granted that whatever was coming out from the White House was accurate. Having since read a fair amount about the endless holes in the White House account, we realize that no event, no matter how traumatic, should be immune to skeptical, independent probing.

While we're not personally involved in activism of any kind, I've noticed in my own circle of friends and co-workers a restless suspicion about what really happened on 9/11. This was something that almost none of us would discuss even a year ago, but as more and more people seem to be challenging the account of that day, I sense a lot of anxiety and bitterness that the record was never set straight.

Tanya Coad
North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Adbusters has done it – separated itself from "progressive" elements such as *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *The New Yorker*, Noam Chomsky, Amy Goodman, et al., all of whom give short shrift to serious 9/11 research. Michael Hey's article signals that such historical research belongs squarely in a blueprint for a new left.

Birch Pavelsky
Fairbanks, Alaska, USA

SHOPPING & NOT SHOPPING

Living the buy-nothing life is more difficult than I anticipated. It's not that we have a hard time with cutting back on our shopping (it's not easy, but we're getting better); it's convincing our family and friends not to buy us stuff. Last Christmas, I asked everyone not to buy us anything. It didn't work. For our house warming, I very strongly insisted. Again, it didn't work.

I find it sad when someone gives us something we don't need – much less want. Some useless knick-knack symbolic of failed human relations. I tell everyone, "Don't buy us anything. Instead, let's have a great conversation (or two!) over an even better home cooked meal." Very few are interested.

Since no one is listening, we've had to bring out the big guns. Now, when we receive a gift we don't need, we don't accept it. This strategy hasn't made us many allies, but we are at wit's end! They believe we're insulting them by not accepting their "gift" – but in reality, we're only trying to make our relationship real and meaningful. I hope one day they see our point of view and accept our dinner invitation.

Jessica Gagnon
Langley, British Columbia, Canada

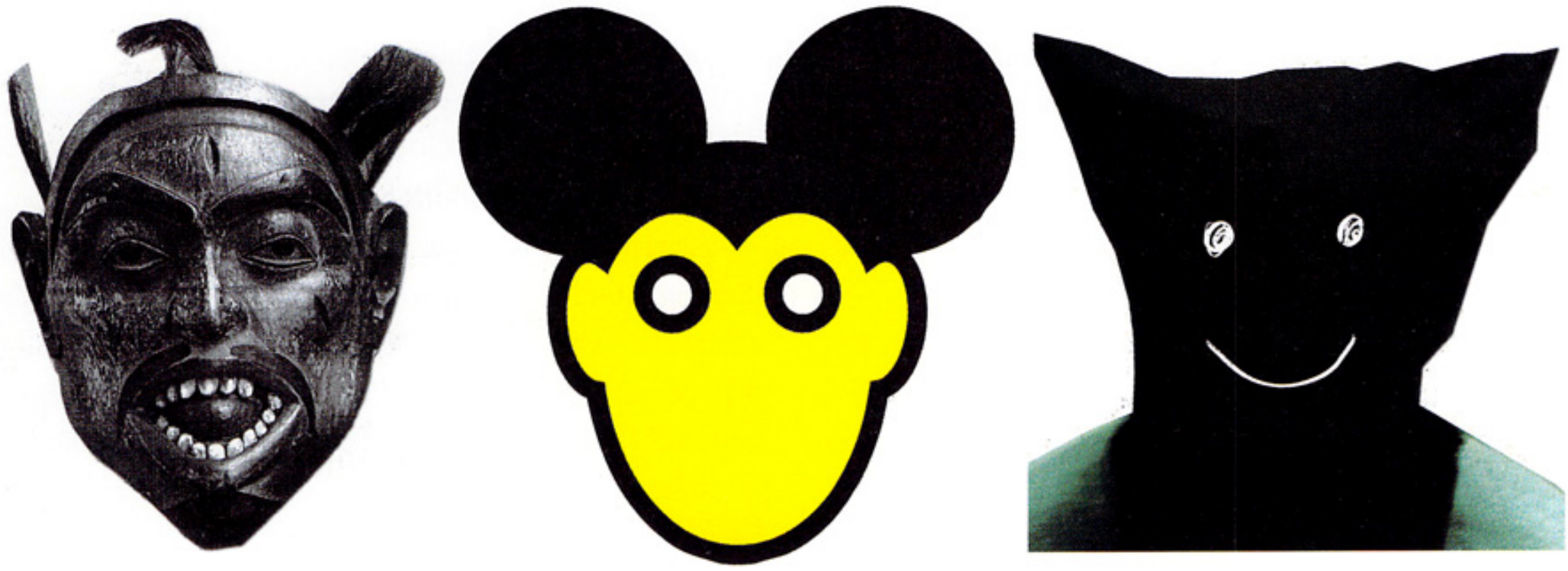
I moved to Ontario for a girl and gave up my job back home as a glazier. I needed to make ends meet, but nothing in the glass industry was available, so now I am working at a clothing store. I always get in trouble for directing customers out of the store since I never recommend our clothing because it comes from sweatshops.

Tyler Backlun
Grimsby, Ontario, Canada

Create lots of little, cheaply producible stickers with the text "Do you really need it?" When you are out shopping or on the street and you see yet another ad or product that doesn't even need to exist, you can stick it on and help the person intending to buy it the fundamental question that the advertisers do not want us to ask ourselves. Placed on an advertisement, it immediately reverses the advertiser's message: "Nike - Do you really need it?" or "Calvin Klein - Do you really need it?"

Marleena Pontynen
UK

I was reading the article "Me, Myself, and



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Sipping on a coffee at the Costa Coffee shop during a six-hour transit at Doha Airport, I had an epiphany as I hazily gazed at the menu board before me. On the left side, the English menu board was written in the same style as Nero, Starbucks and Coffee Republic; with the coffee names, sizes and prices going from left to right. However, on the other side of the coffee machine, the Arabic menu board acted as a mirrored reflection of the English menu; prices and sizes came first on the left hand side, then the names of the coffees on the right. This is because Arabic is read from right to left.

Why is this important, you ask? Well, as the world faces a battle between the staunch principles of the eastern and western worlds, this coffee board expressed the fundamental and most basic difference between these two cultures: language and how to process it.

Perhaps now I should reveal to you that I am of mixed race – Chinese and British. Thus, I can safely say that, being half of two completely contrasting cultures, my understanding of cultural symmetry and distance has been an integral part of my existence.

In China, words are traditionally read from right to left, as in Arabic. I remember asking my mother when I was old enough to read, why on earth the Chinese read in this seemingly illogical direction, no doubt a prejudice based on my English education. In response, my dear mother smiled and told me that this was just the way it was. From that day it didn't seem strange at all, and I enjoyed flipping through magazines in a seemingly disordered fashion.

I remember reading two very relevant articles in *New Scientist* some years ago. One talked about how language affects our perspective on the world. For example, most Europeans – besides the English – view objects as having genders. This means when French children view a table, they don't merely see "a table." They see a "she table." How this effects a sense of reality may explain why speakers of romance languages seem more sensitive, passionate and intense than the British . . . perhaps.

Or what of syntax and the construction of a sentence? In Greece, the way you construct a sentence can have numerous combinations. "I ate a souvlaki," "A souvlaki I ate." There is a flexibility in Greek that seems to reflect the very nature of the Greeks themselves.

And what about meaning? In Chinese, the literal translation of the word "entry" is "enter mouth." What kind of visual image does this create in a Chinese child's brain? In fact, the term "dim sum" is actually literally translated into "touch the heart," based on the fact that small rich tastes are shared between family and friends, reflecting a deeper relationship with the ritual of eating that is ingrained in the language.

Moving on to *New Scientist* article number two, about eastern and western perspectives. This article described a simple experiment that had been conducted in America. A group of scientists assembled a Chinese group and a western group and showed them one photo of a couple at Niagara Falls. The scientists asked the groups to comment on what they saw. What the scientists discovered was that the western group commented on the couple first – their sex, their appearance and their relationship together. The Chinese group commented on their surroundings first.

So what can be drawn from this? I now bring in an experiment carried out by Gereon Fink and John Marshall on the different uses of the left and right sides of the brain. Their conclusion, which was swiftly accepted by the scientific community, was that the left side of the brain focused on details, whilst the right side focused on the broader picture.

If we apply this to the use of written language, then could this explain why we face a battle between an ideology that is deemed worthy to die for, in the name of that higher moral principle, and an ideology that focuses on the efforts of an individual in order to gain capital?

Either way, this discussion is too short and too general in order to gain a conclusion. But in a predominately globalized world, these questions are becoming necessary.

Most neurologists, when asked whether certain people use their right brain more than their left, at best, see it as a simplistic idea that over-generalizes the perspectives of a human being. Instead, perhaps we must all learn to accept both sides. After all, at the end of the day, we're all thirsty for something – and from what I can see at the Costa Coffee menu board at Doha Airport, the coffee machine is right smack bang in the middle.

"New Mentalist"
via email



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Gap" [Adbusters #70] and it gave me the shivers. It seems to me that nobody knows why they do anything anymore. I go to church and feel nothing. I look around and I see one hundred of the same blank expressions. Sometimes I question my mom on why we go to church and I always get the same generic answer. I go to school and see kids who all look like they've hopped right out of the TV and think to myself, "I don't want to be like that." For once, I'm going to try to think for myself and try to forget about what others think. But then what happens if what I'm thinking is just adapted from some other influence? Who would I be if I never experienced exterior influences of any sort? Who am I, true and pure?

Curtis L
St. Albert, Alberta, Canada

Something rather interesting happened to a good friend of mine. Mr. Gallacher is a young illustrator from Melbourne, Australia, who was using MySpace as his own mini-website for publishing his political cartoons and artwork, until such time as he could afford to put together a proper site for himself. He'd been publishing various cartoons with Australian celebrities and political figures, and nothing seemed to be a problem.

Then he put up a cartoon involving George Bush, John Howard and Rupert Murdoch in a ménage à trois – having just seen the documentary Outfoxed, I think he was feeling put out by all of it. Suddenly, and much to his chagrin, his account was deleted, all his messages and images erased.

Mr. Gallacher later found out that MySpace is owned by News Corp. (what isn't?), and we couldn't help but wonder. I mean, he'd put up some fairly controversial subject matter in the past, but this was the

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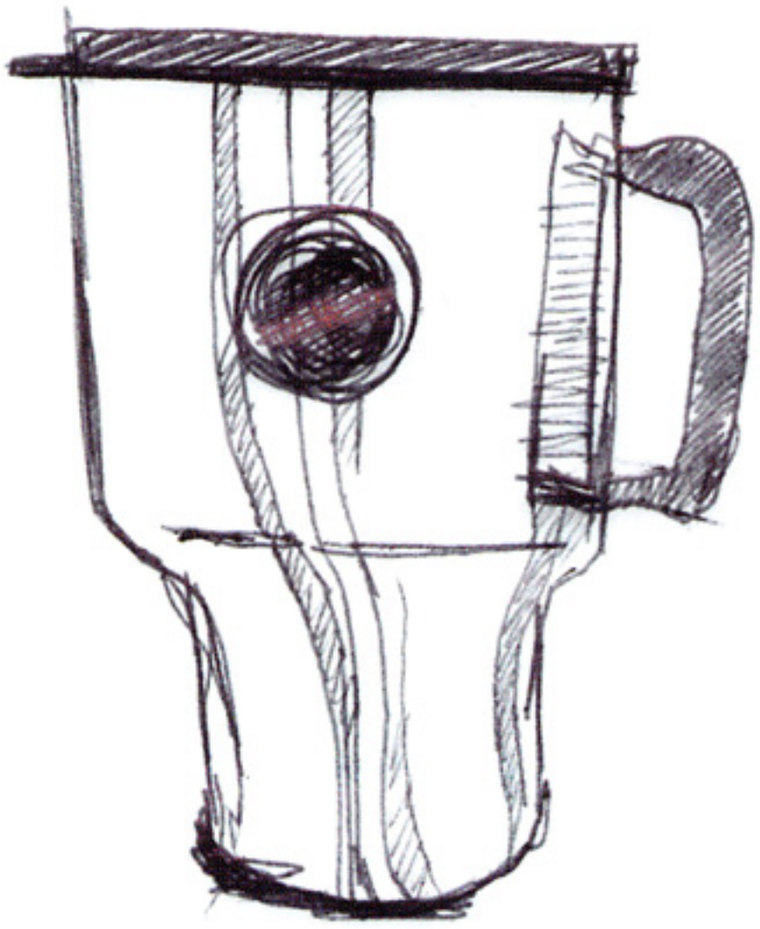
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first one involving Murdoch, and poof, his account is deleted.

Simon J Green
via email

Yesterday, after I left work in a ritzy high-rise north of the Chicago loop, I did something really unusual. I *didn't* use my cell phone. I left it in my pocket. I wasn't prompted by anything at all really, I just purposely *didn't* pick it up to call anyone at all. This is abnormal for me, I'm not sure when my compulsion to gab on the phone set in, but I've sometimes felt like I could hardly function without it.

I got on the L train, watched the sun set and listened to the soft breathing of the old woman who sat down next to me. I thought about my grandmas, I thought about recycling batteries, about how I don't want to use plastic anymore. I didn't bother thinking about the actual wedding planning (don't get me started), but I thought about how much I love my fiancé. When I got home, I had this sense of self that I haven't noticed for awhile. I noticed that I was a little hungry. I noticed that I didn't even want to talk to anyone on the phone, I wanted to cook a meal and read a book and spend some time with my roommate. I felt a great sense of appreciation.

I got my issue of *Adbusters* today and as I was reading some of the reader's responses, it made me sad to see a lot of grouchy emails. We should be finding new ways to free-up our time to send out more joy into the world, avoiding the luxury of focusing on cynicism. It is my sincere hope that this letter makes someone take a moment to breathe today and to consider, instead of griping, *appreciating*.

Rachel Mann
Chicago, Illinois, USA

There is a concept which I thought you might be interested in addressing that is becoming more apparent to me the more deeply involved I become with the "green" or "sustainability" movement that is gaining momentum at present (about 40 years too late, but better late than never, we all hope). The concept that I believe is ripe for an *Adbusters* treatment is the rise of Green Hypocrisy, business and marketing efforts that are surfing the green wave to pad their respective bottom line while misleading the masses.

It extends beyond greenwashing ("Clean Coal!") or manipulation of scientific opinion – both egregious in my view. Just as *Vanity Fair* and other publications are beginning to crank out their annual "green"



The Big Ideas of 2007
First World Fascismo; Japan's Neocons; Israel's War Against The Future



The Blueprint for a New Left
The Battle for the Canuck Soul; Chinese Art Meets Global Capital; Outlaw Nation



Beginnings of Sorrow
The U.S. Left's Silly Victim Complex; Eating Our Young; North American Superstate

editions (200+ pages on glossy stock), I'm hoping to find an *Adbusters* annual "green awards" edition with a shout out to my perennial favorites: ExxonMobil, Chevron, GE, GM, Halliburton and other corporations which rarely fail in filling me with disgust.

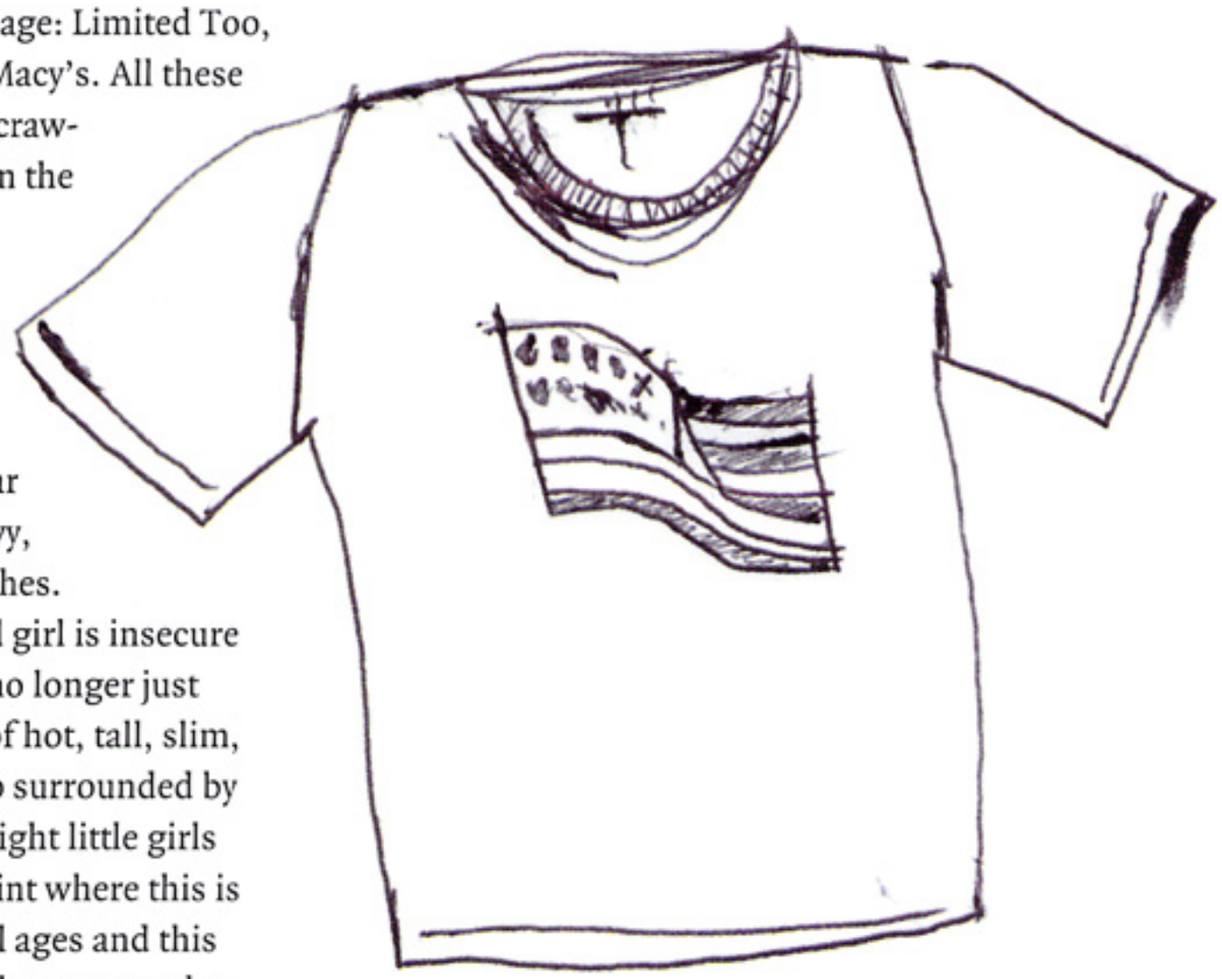
George Polisner
President/CEO, Alonovo

After school, I work at an elementary school teaching gymnastics to six through eight year old girls. Last week, one of the six year olds was walking barefoot to the classroom so I offered to carry her on my back. When I asked her, she immediately looked down and mumbled, "No. I'm too heavy." I was shocked. Why is a six year old insecure about her weight? She is in first grade; this is the time in your life where your biggest worry is what time recess is starting.

On my way home, I passed a Gap Kids store. The display window had skinny little girls and boys (about the age of six) modelling Gap clothes. I went home and searched through some magazines I received, and I found a Pottery Barn Kids magazine. The magazine was full of young, thin girls and boys enjoying their Pottery Barn rooms. I signed online and thought of stores I used to shop at when I was that age: Limited Too, Old Navy, Gymboree and Macy's. All these websites were filled with scrawny little boys and girls; even the Toys "R" Us website contained skinny boys and girls. I guess you have to be slim to have a Pottery Barn room, play with Toys "R" Us toys, wear Gap, Limited Too, Old Navy, Gymboree and Macy's clothes.

This is why a six-year-old girl is insecure about her weight. We are no longer just surrounded by the image of hot, tall, slim, young women. We are also surrounded by an image of cute, underweight little girls and boys. We are at the point where this is considered beautiful for all ages and this image of beauty needs to change soon before three-year-old boys are taking steroids and pumping iron while the girls are skipping meals.

Katrina Bilella



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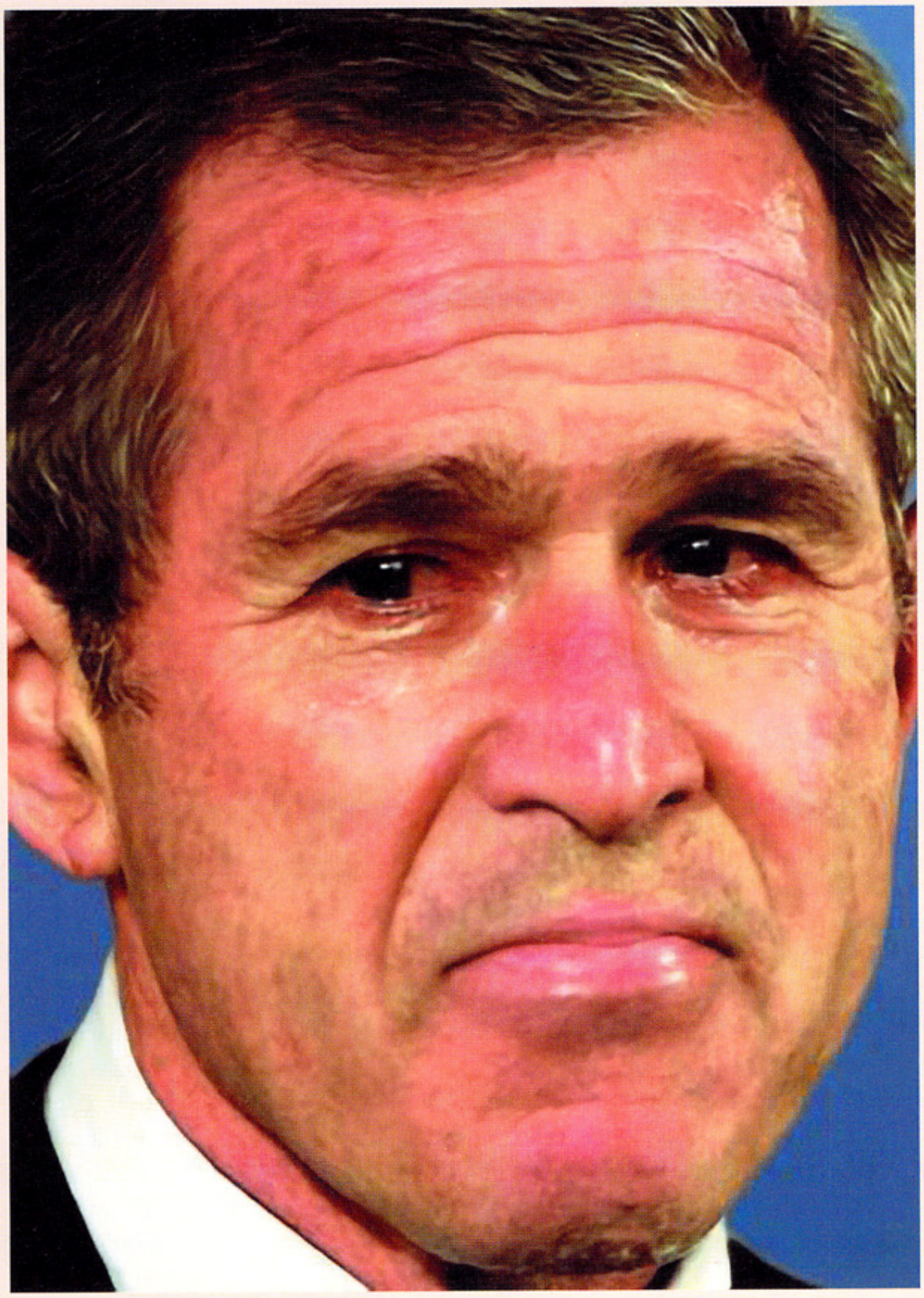
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politico



SENATOR JOSEPH BIDEN: Do you think that establishing a presence in Iraq was the objective of this administration initially?

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: I have no idea what the president's initial objective was because the motives he provided for the action proved to be entirely erroneous, and if they were the real motives, then the whole campaign was based on false assumptions.

BIDEN: It's unfair to ask you to be a soothsayer. I apologize.

BRZEZINSKI: Now, if there were hidden motives, I can imagine several. One would be to gain American domination over the region's oil, to put it very simplistically. Another could be to help maximize Israel's security by removing a powerful Arab state. Another one could have been simply to get rid of an obnoxious regime with which the United States had accounts to settle going back to '91, including the alleged assassination attempt against President Bush Sr. There could be a variety of motives. But the official motives were weapons of mass destruction.

– *from Harpers, April 2007*

WE ARE *SURROUNDED* BY PHONIES

by DICK MEYER

I find that after covering politics for 25 years what I really yearn for is not great leaders, smart reforms, nor policies that I agree with. What I crave is authenticity.

I can witness and write about policies and people I totally disagree with, stupidity, bureaucracy, incompetence, greed, boundless ambition and power lust without any exaggerated feelings of frustration or despondency. What I can no longer stomach without pulling my hair out is phoniness on the scale that I observe it today.

Put another way, what I miss is the simple honesty, the genuine moment, the unscripted moment, the gaffe – anything that has not been run through the Cuisinart of marketing, focus groups and linguistic analysis. "The enemy isn't liberalism," the late columnist Lars-Erik Nelson said. "The enemy isn't conservatism. The enemy is bullshit." I'll proudly swipe that as a motto.

I really don't know anyone who doesn't feel this way. "One of the biggest reasons I left Elkton Hills was because I was surrounded by phonies," said J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield, the greatest enemy of phonies of all. Now it seems like we're all at Elkton Hills. And it's crumby.

Politics happens to be my Petri dish. It is something I know a lot about and where I first spot things I often notice in other parts of society. I won't try to define what I mean by phony or inauthentic in this column and just stick to Potter Stewart's dictum on pornography: you know it when you see it.

But politics is probably only slightly less authentic than other areas of American culture.

We shop at malls that are designed to look like "real" small town centers. We live in gated or planned "communities" with names like Pheasant Crossing and River Run selected by real estate developers. We read about Pastor Ted, the latest mega-evangelist nabbed in a sex and drugs scandal. We wait for Mark Foley to get out of rehab so he can go on Oprah and announce his book deal. We watch freak shows that are insultingly called reality television; there are no shows left about families with parents and children. We buy millions of self-help books a year promising new and certain paths to happiness. Even bodies are artificial; we have fake boobs, dyed hair, botoxed eyes and liposuctioned thighs.

What I miss is the simple honesty, the genuine moment, the unscripted moment.

We are surrounded by phonies. And phoniness.

But everything isn't phony. And we pine, unconsciously and consciously, for the authentic, sincere, genuine and non-artificial – the un-phony. We crave authenticity.

Often what I am calling phony emerges after something older, something that felt authentic, has gone away. In politics, for example, there have been phonies, hypocrites and blowhards since the spoken word was invented. But American politics changed dramatically after modern political marketers, pollsters and ad makers transformed politics for the TV-generation and later for the Information Age. They invented a kind of artificial, ersatz politics: wedge issues, Astroturf lobbying, kabuki hearings, spin, "on message," photo-ops and negative television ads. Of course there have always been dirty tricks and showboating in politics. What has happened in the era of electronic media is categorically different.

A most important example of all this has been the decline of regular, old-fashioned communities – places where people live very near relatives of many generations, friends of many generations and where they spend most of their lives. The effects of our nomadic habits and of suburban sprawl – of people living among strangers and new acquaintances – have been vast and mostly painful. And it has been accompanied by the decline of traditional religion, which served to anchor many people in fast-changing circumstances.

Because it is affordable and a necessity, food is actually often a place where people seek authenticity – and a measure of control and aesthetic choice. Foodies will pay a high price in time and money for line-caught salmon, Scottish smoked salmon and Eritrean coffee. Natural food fans will do the same for local, organic collard greens, free range chicken and real cheese – not fake cheese. Comical? Yes, but it is revealing, too.

In politics, I think the search for authenticity is often incorrectly described as polarization. Polarization of the red/blue, 50-50 America, Franken vs. O'Reilly is mostly myth and marketing. As this last election shows, most voters are moderate. Real extremists are just that – extreme minorities. Polls consistently show that Americans broadly share basic civic and social values.

But polls also show that people at the left and right edges of the spectrum are more extreme and angrier than they used to be. And the political elite is absolutely more rabid and recalcitrant. Politically engaged individuals are more likely to be very attached to a single issue or to an ideology. There is a decline in tolerance of other views. And an increase in people feeling that their values and lifestyles are genuinely threatened by those they disagree with, their political enemies. It's

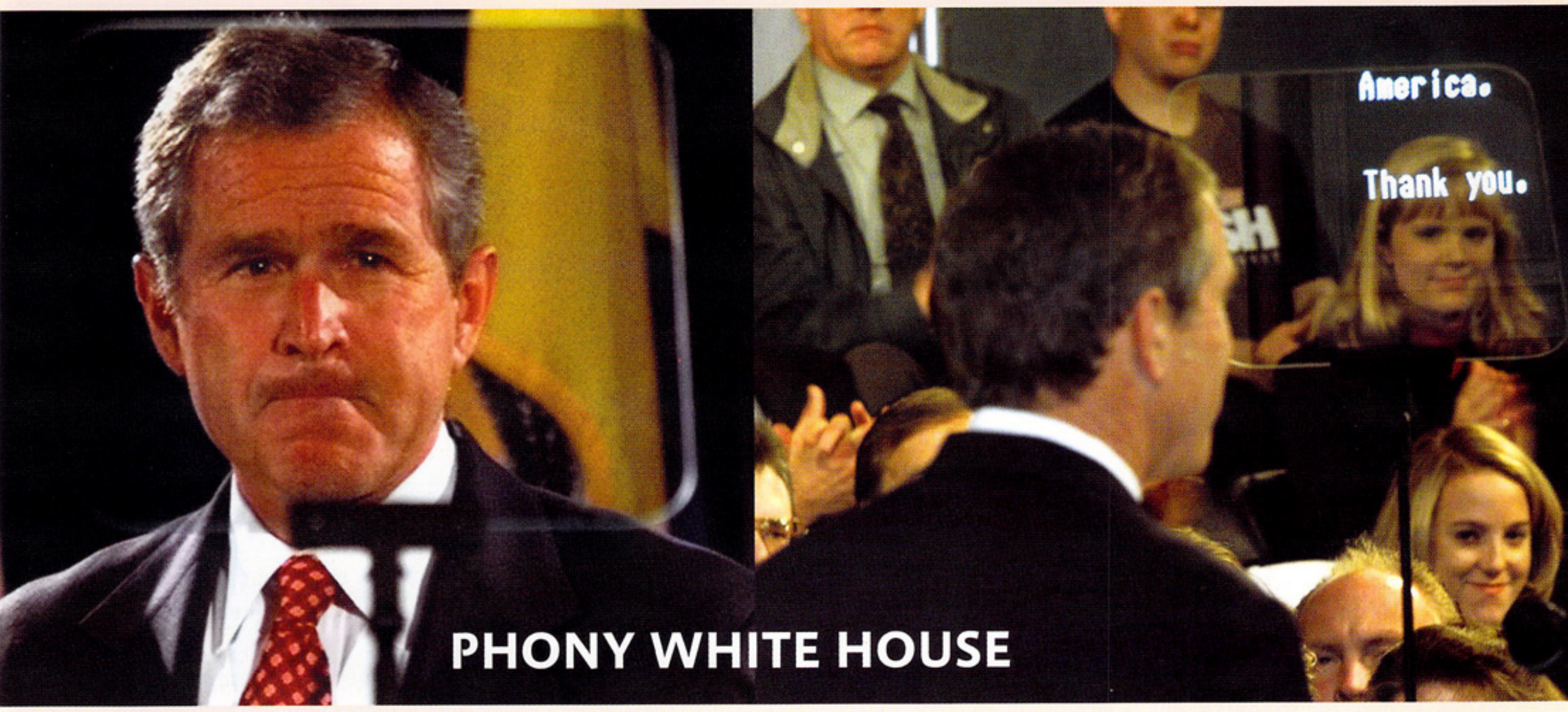
not polarization, but balkanization.

In other words, many of us are over-attached to our politics, to our own positions and perspectives. We cling to them. We're brittle in arguments. Why? Well, it's partly because the politics we see on television is so thin. But I also suggest that part of the answer is we are trying to replace something we have lost post-neighborhood, Information Age, corporate America and we are trying to compensate by holding for dear life to things that feel important, orienting and authentic.

America is an invented place, artificial by some historical measures. But Americans were long viewed by the rest of the world as unusually earnest and genuine. Unshackled by class, social status and ancestry, Americans were free to be themselves – authentic. We have always prided ourselves on that. The American story is that we are self-made and thus uniquely able to be true to ourselves. It's a paradox though: invention vs. authenticity.

Still, the successful balance remains an American ideal. But it is harder to achieve in a modern world where invention increasingly creates the artificial. Like Holden at Elkton Hills, we really are surrounded by phonies.

Adapted from Dick Meyer's CBS News commentary, "Land of the Fake" (November 6, 2006).



REUTERS/JEFF MITCHELL

PHONY WHITE HOUSE

This man is delivering his state of the union address to his people, reading cue sheets. Short sentences written in large luminous letters, on a special screen only he can see. The illusion of spontaneity, of passion – the command of language, even – is totally false, right down to the moment he pauses, to look us square in the eye . . .

. . . before shifting his gaze slightly to the left. He smiles confidently, then starts reading from the other screen.

Watching and listening to this empty performance makes me wonder whose ideas he's trying to express. All Bush has to do is to shuffle his head back and forth, in mock spontaneity, to mouth the words as they form before his eyes.

Why can't he say what he means, using his own words?

Press conferences are no less fake. In her book, *Watchdogs of Democracy*, longtime UPI journalist Helen Thomas explains how the presidency has tried to perfect the art of providing "managed news." According to Thomas, reporters who write unfavorable stories are frequently harassed, or denied access to information. She notes that "while the presidential press conference appears to be an open forum for questions, it is, in reality, controlled by the White House. It is staged by the White House and the president's answers are scrutinized, prepared and rehearsed before the actual event ever begins."

Why do citizens accept this kind of charade?

I wonder – if you took away his text, would the president be able to ad-lib his state-of-the-union address? Would he be able to come up with something intelligent and genuine? On the fly and off the cuff?

If the answer is no, then why is he president?

– *Michael Hey*



HARPER – Fake Green

Walking through Vancouver's Stanley Park last January where thousands of trees had been felled by hurricane-like windstorms, Canada's newly appointed Conservative environment minister called the destruction a "wake-up call." Having once called the Kyoto Accord a "socialist scheme" designed to suck money out of rich countries, Prime Minister Stephen Harper is now trying to paint himself green. He appointed a tough new environment minister, spent millions on environmental programs and redrafted a stronger version of his government's climate change strategy. But Harper's makeover isn't washing with Canadian environmentalists, who see a wolf dressed in frog's clothing. "The Conservatives are far from being environmentally friendly," says Stephen Hazell, executive director of Sierra Club of Canada. "Canada is still a big time international laggard when it comes to addressing and reducing greenhouse gas emissions."

After failing to get any support for his ironically-titled Clean Air Act, Harper's government announced a new climate change policy last April called "Turning the Corner" that was supposed to strike a balance between environmental and industry concerns. But the new strategy was a gift to corporations and gave them so many loopholes and exemptions from target caps that it will actually lead to a rise in greenhouse gas emissions.

Through "intensity-based targets," corporations can increase their pollution as they increase their production. It will also give new companies three years to start meeting targets – widely seen as a free pass for the oil and gas companies operating in Alberta's toxic tar sands, which are desperately trying to ramp up production to meet the United States' insatiable need for oil. Under the new plan, companies can also meet 70 percent of their targets simply by paying into a fund, and those that don't meet their targets can just buy their way out with carbon credits.

Most shameful of all is that Harper's new strategy means

Canada will be the first country that ratified the Kyoto Accord to formally abandon its commitment

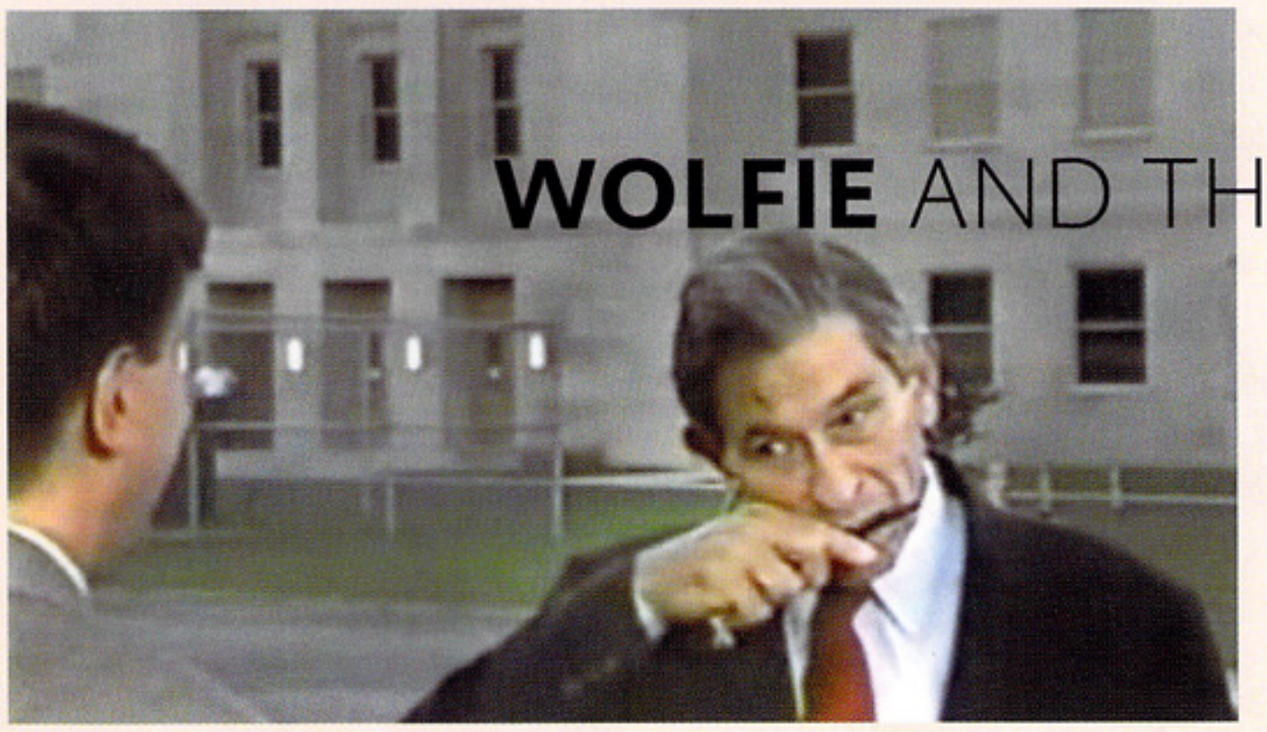
to the international agreement. Instead of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by six percent below 1990 levels by 2012, Harper's Canada won't start cutting emissions until 2010, and calls for a 20 percent reduction in emissions from today's levels by 2020. In a best case scenario, Canada won't meet its Kyoto commitment until 2025.

Harper's attempt to portray himself as environmentally con-

scious is all the more insulting considering his track record. Since he was elected in 2006, Harper has cut 20 different federal programs meant to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, made secret deals with George Bush and American oil executives to bolster production of the Albertan tar sands (which already consume 600 million cubic feet of natural gas a day), and introduced the incredulous Clean Air Act, which doesn't set hard caps on emissions until 2050.

Like many aspects of his appearance, Harper is trying to mask his persona as a right-wing radical and re-brand himself as a middle-of-the-road moderate in order to appeal to Canadian voters. While he has managed to calm some people's fears by diluting his stance on the Iraq War and gay marriage, Harper's environmental transformation is a façade. But Canada and the rest of the world have little time left to play with his disguises. With the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warning that billions of people around the world are going to face food and water shortages caused by flooding within 13 years, Harper's "greening" is nothing more than a whitewash.

– *Sean Condon*



WOLFIE AND THE **NEOCONCUBINE**

by KATHLEEN CHRISTISON

All's fair in love and war, they say, but in recent years neoconservative luminary Paul Wolfowitz has gone to unseemly extremes in both. As deputy secretary of defense, Wolfowitz was a principal architect of the misbegotten 2003 US invasion of Iraq. He managed to slither away from responsibility for that disaster two years later – his reputation more or less intact despite US casualties of several thousand and Iraqi civilian deaths in the hundreds of thousands – to assume the prestigious post of president of the World Bank. He has now blotted his copy book in that position, but he may be able to tough this one out as well.

We've come to find that Wolfowitz has had a girlfriend for several years, for whom he has more than once managed to do favors at the expense of the US taxpayer. Shaha Riza is a British citizen, of Libyan-Saudi-Syrian parents, who worked as a Middle East and North Africa expert at the World Bank until Wolfowitz took the Bank's presidency. Because the Bank, like US government agencies, has anti-nepotism regulations prohibiting personal relationships between supervisors and employees, Wolfowitz was under pressure to find another position for his lovely.

He initially protested that it should not be necessary to move her. He had, after all, gotten away with a little nepotism on her behalf while still at the Pentagon by forcing a defense contractor to take her on as an unpaid consultant on a contract that sent her on an expenses-paid trip to Iraq for a month in 2003 to study how to establish an Iraqi government. But ultimately Wolfowitz bowed to Bank convention and found Riza a cushy position at a new State Department-funded think tank, the Foundation for the Future, complete with a 50 percent raise in her already substantial tax-exempt salary. She now earns over $190,000. Inevitably, World Bank employees have taken to calling Riza the "neoconcubine."

The affair has implications beyond personal peccadilloes. Because Wolfowitz has made fighting corruption in foreign governments a major objective, Bank employees believe the Bank's reputation is at stake and have stepped up their campaign to force his resignation. The evidence of Wolfowitz's personal corruption has also focused attention on indications of cronyism – the fact that he took with him to the Bank several right-wing Pentagon aides who had worked on the Iraq War. In addition, of his five international appointments at the Bank, three are former senior officials of governments that backed the US invasion.

Wolfowitz has a long association with neoconservatives and with the neocons' hawkish, imperialistic, pro-Israeli philosophy. Throughout his career in various Defense and State Department positions over more than three decades,

Wolfowitz has worked closely with a variety of neocons – including Richard Perle, Elliott Abrams, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, and Douglas Feith.

Wolfowitz has generally dealt with broader strategic issues rather than with Israel specifically, but it is clear that Israel has always been a major interest and may have been the principal impetus for the campaign of which he became the spearhead in the Bush administration, to effect regime change in Iraq and redraw the Middle East map.

Profiles of Wolfowitz portray two distinct aspects: one ruthless, obsessively bent on advancing US global domination, seriously prepared to "end," as he once put it, states that support terrorism in any way; and the other, a softer mode, showing him as a political moralist, even a bleeding heart on social issues, desirous for purely humanitarian reasons of modernizing and democratizing the Islamic world. Whatever intentions he has for the Middle East, his interest in Israel always crops up: even profiles that downplay his attachment to Israel nonetheless always mention the influence that the Holocaust – in which several of his family perished – has had on his thinking.

One Pentagon source described him frankly as "over-the-top crazy when it comes to Israel." Whatever Wolfowitz' fate, his career will be severely compromised by the controversy unleashed by this scandal. With Rumsfeld and Feith already out of the picture, it looks like Wolfowitz will be the next neocon from the Bush administration to bite the dust.

Kathleen Christison is a former senior CIA political analyst and has been involved with Middle East issues for 30 years.



by **MATT TAIBBI**

NEOCON II: LIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE

Call it the Leslie Nielsen effect. Your first attempt at a show-biz career fizzles out and dies, but your failure is so quirky and charming that it wins you a whole second career. Think Robert Goulet, Bill Shatner, even John Travolta. America loves a brave second act, particularly one that doesn't mind doing a take or two with egg still on his face. What the Zucker brothers did for actors, the neocons are now doing for politics. In the first six years of the Bush presidency the administration's ideological nucleus – a tribe of humorless conservative revolutionaries led by Dick Cheney and including the likes of Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Doug Feith and Elliott Abrams – racked up a startling record in matters of official policy. From their juking of the case for the Iraq War to their Jacobin-esque purges within the government's intelligence apparatus to their paranoid and sometimes criminal fragging of political enemies great and minor, the neoconservatives working for George Bush botched virtually every important move they made in the last six years.

Moreover, each time they used the presidency's bully pulpit to make a prediction, be it about the post-invasion spread of democracy in the Middle East, the utility of Iraqi oil revenues in financing the occupation, or the chilling effect our presence in Iraq would have on Palestinian resolve, more or less exactly the opposite ended up taking place.

And yet, despite the walloping defeat of the Republicans in the 2006 midterm elections that seemed to spell the end of neocon rule in Washington, the clowns are once again spilling out of the Volkswagen. Lately the neocons seem to be all over the public airwaves, and not as the targets of purgative public flogging or tarring ceremonies, but as the subjects of serious interviews, with respected journalists treating them

like real human beings with real opinions. Even worse, a few are still in office, and appear to be cooking up a last-minute encore before the curtain finally comes down in '08.

Richard Perle, the former head of the Defense Policy Board, known in the Beltway as the "Prince of Darkness," has been on TV a lot lately in a much-publicized public spat with former CIA director George Tenet, who recently accused Perle of targeting Iraq days after 9/11. John Bolton, former UN-hating ambassador to the UN, recently won the Bradley Prize for "outstanding intellectual achievement" – achievement that presumably includes helping make the case for the Iraq disaster and support for a future invasion of Iran. In his acceptance speech, Bolton cheekily credited Tehran, Pyongyang and other rogue nations for his success, thanking them just for "being themselves." And while Scooter Libby crashed at trial, Doug Feith soft-landed into a tenure track at Georgetown, where he will now teach history, a subject he spent the past five years or so violently misinterpreting.

The neocons remain a bold presence in the media for a number of reasons. Number one, they still have real political power. Dick Cheney is still the vice president, and the Pentagon is still guided heavily by the neocon-dominated Office of Special Plans (OSP), where the power is now reportedly concentrated in an office called the Iranian Directorate, charged with helping make the case for war with Iran. Amid all the public hand-wringing about a congressional demand for an Iraq withdrawal timeline, Washington is abuzz with rumors that the neocons are loading up for one last historical Hail Mary, a "long bomb" to throw at Tehran before Bush leaves office. The knowledge that they are crazy enough to try something like that makes people in the capital take them seriously.

But beyond that, there just hasn't been any effort in the media to identify and really make clear the root causes of the Iraq policy failure. In the current Washington mythology – a mythology reflected in public statements of everyone from John McCain to Hillary Clinton – the Iraq War blew up in our faces for logistical reasons, because we didn't send enough troops, or have a sound occupation plan, or have an "understanding of the insurgency." It was the right war, wrong execution, wrong defense secretary. The failure had nothing to do with the mistake of placing our bets on a radical revolutionary policy of "pre-emptive invasion," or with the White House's authoritarian efforts to castrate the Pentagon and the CIA and replace them with their own intelligence-gathering and policymaking apparatuses.

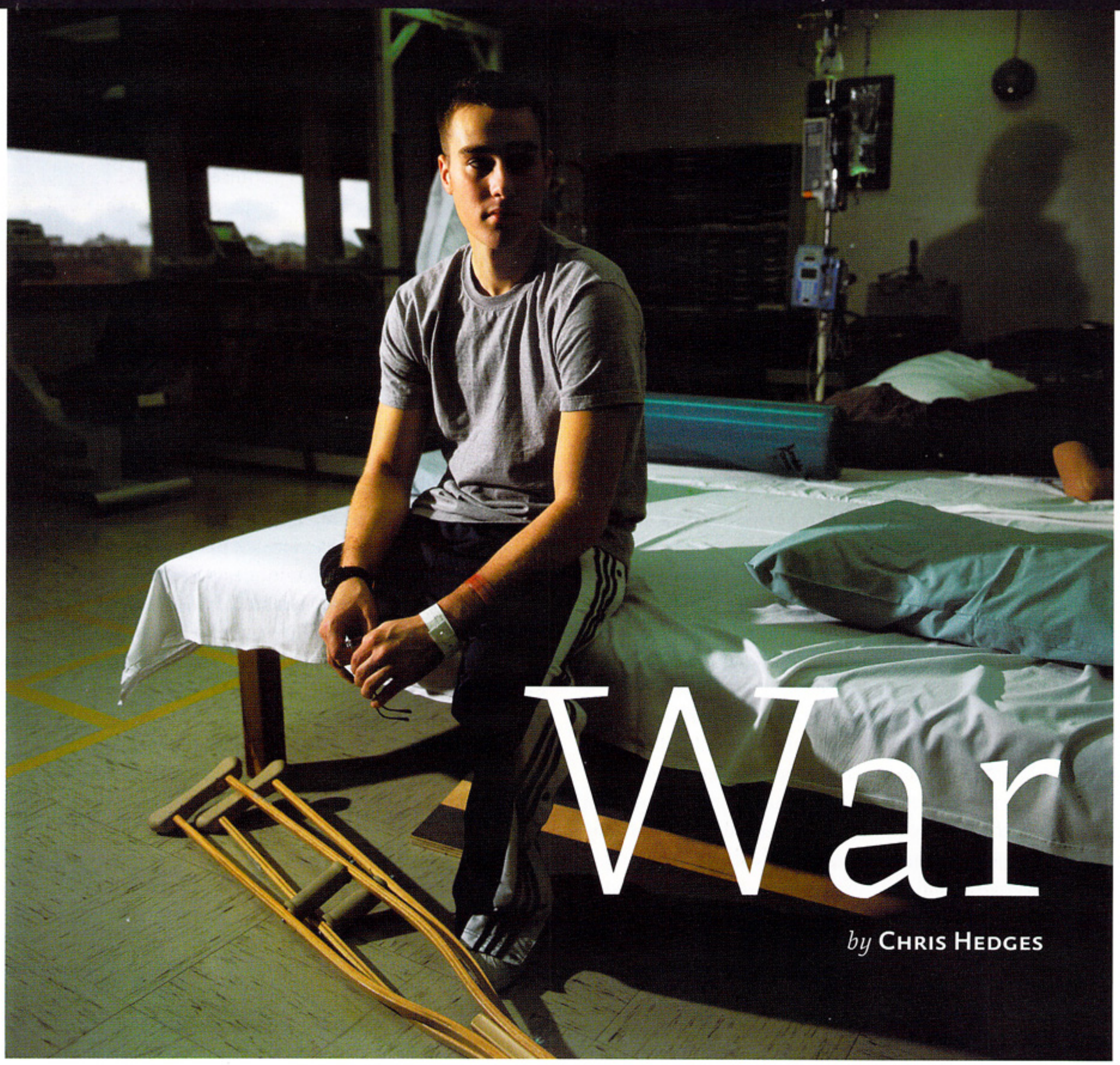
The neocons may have been proven wrong in the particulars, and to ordinary people their legacy may turn out to be a nightmarish Middle East bloodbath and decades of debt, but in Washington they're still revered as canny operators who swept two election seasons with a drooling mannequin for a candidate and for years ruled Washington with almost Caligulan abandon. They were idiots in terms of how the world worked, but they understood power in the Beltway better than Nixon, better than Clinton, better really than any White House clan since the Roosevelt years. That's why they'll keep getting top billing on talk shows and invites to all the best Washington parties, even if, as seems likely, they leave office 18 months from now with half the planet in flames.

> In Washington there is no shame in being wrong; there's only shame in losing.

In Washington there is no shame in being wrong; there's only shame in losing. The neocons were wrong as hell, but they were also winners. That's why no one should expect them to go away now. That's especially true since their only real competition in the intellectual arena is the cynical third-way corporatism of the Democratic party, a tenuous and depressing alliance of business interests and New-Deal interest groups whose most persuasive "idea" is that it is not neo-conservatism. The neocons, wrong and stupid as they might be, at least represent a clearly-articulated dream of unchecked greed, power and big-stick foreign conquest that appeals in an elemental way to the dark side of the American psyche. Until America rejects that dream – and don't hold your breath for that – don't count on the Boltons and the Perles disappearing from view.

Matt Taibbi is a contributing editor to Rolling Stone *magazine. His book,* Smells Like Dead Elephants, *is due out next year.*

The Death Mask of War



by Chris Hedges

All troops, when they occupy and battle insurgent forces, as in Iraq, or Gaza or Vietnam, are placed in "atrocity producing situations." In this environment, surrounded by a hostile population, simple acts such as going to a store to buy a can of Coke means you can be killed. This constant fear and stress pushes troops to view everyone around them as the enemy. This hostility is compounded when the enemy, as in Iraq, is elusive, shadowy and hard to find. The rage soldiers feel after a roadside bomb explodes, killing or maiming their comrades, is one that is easily directed over time to innocent civilians who are seen to support the insurgents. It is a short psychological leap, but a massive moral leap. It is a leap from killing – the shooting of someone who has the capacity to do you harm – to murder – the deadly assault against someone who cannot harm you. The war in Iraq is now primarily about murder. There is very little killing.

After four years of war, American Marines and soldiers have become socialized to atrocity. The American killing project is not described in these terms to a distant public. The politicians still speak in the abstract terms of glory, honor, and heroism, in the necessity of improving the world, in lofty phrases of political and spiritual renewal. Those who kill large numbers of people always claim it as a virtue. The campaign to rid the world of terror is expressed with this rhetoric, as if once all terrorists are destroyed evil itself will vanish. The reality behind the myth, however, is very different. The reality and the ideal clash when soldiers and Marines return home, alienating these combat veterans from the world around them, a world that still dines out on the myth of war and the virtues of the nation. But slowly returning veterans are giving us a new narrative of the war – one that exposes the vast enterprise of industrial slaughter unleashed in Iraq for a lie and sustained because of wounded national pride and willful ignorance. "This unit sets up this traffic control point and this 18 year old kid is on top of an armored Humvee with a .50 caliber machine gun," remembered Geoffrey Millard who served in Tikrit with the 42nd Infantry Division. "And this car speeds at him pretty quick and he makes a split second decision that that's a suicide bomber, and he presses the butterfly trigger and puts 200 rounds in less than a minute into this vehicle. It killed the mother, a father and two kids. The boy was aged four and the daughter was aged three."

"And they briefed this to the general," Millard said, "and they briefed it gruesome. I mean, they had pictures. They briefed it to him. And this colonel turns around to this full division staff and says, 'if these fucking Hadjis learned to drive, this shit wouldn't happen.'"

Those who come back from war, like Millard and tens of thousands of other veterans, suffer not only delayed reactions to stress, but a crisis of faith. The God they knew, or thought they knew, failed them. The church or the synagogue or the mosque, which promised redemption by serving God and country, did not prepare them for the betrayal of this civic religion, for the capacity we all have for human atrocity, for the lies and myths used to mask the reality of war. War is always about betrayal, betrayal of the young by the old, of idealists by cynics and of troops by politicians. This bitter knowledge of betrayal has seeped into the ranks of American troops. It has unleashed a new wave of embittered veterans not seen since the Vietnam War. It has made it possible for us to begin, again, to see war's death mask.

"And then, you know, my sort of sentiment of what the fuck are we doing, that I felt that way in Iraq," said Sergeant Ben Flanders, who estimated that he ran hundreds of convoys in Iraq. "It's the sort of insanity of it and the fact that it reduces it. Well, I think war does anyway, but I felt like there was this enormous reduction in my compassion for people, the only thing that wound up mattering is myself and the guys that I was with. And everybody else be damned, whether you are an Iraqi, I'm sorry, I'm sorry you live here, I'm sorry this is a terrible situation, and I'm sorry that you have to deal with all of, you know, army vehicles running around and shooting, and these insurgents and all this stuff.

"The first briefing you get when you get off the plane in Kuwait, and you get off the plane and you're holding a duffle bag in each hand," Millard remembered. "You've got your weapon slung. You've got a web sack on your back. You're dying of heat. You're tired. You're jet-lagged. Your mind is just full of goop. And then, you're scared on top of that, be-

"It takes little in wartime to turn ordinary men into killers. Most give themselves willingly to the seduction of unlimited power to destroy."

cause, you know, you're in Kuwait, you're not in the States anymore . . . so fear sets in, too. And they sit you into this little briefing room and you get this briefing about how, you know, you can't trust any of these fucking Hadjis, because all these fucking Hadjis are going to kill you. And Hadji is always used as a term of disrespect and usually, with the 'f' word in front of it."

War is also the pornography of violence. It has a dark beauty, filled with the monstrous and the grotesque. The Bible calls it "the lust of the eye" and warns believers against it. War allows us to engage in lusts and passions we keep hidden in the deepest, most private interiors of our fantasy life. It allows us to destroy not only things but human beings. In that moment of wholesale destruction, we wield the power to the divine, the power to revoke another person's charter to live on this earth. The frenzy of this destruction – and when unit discipline breaks down, or there was no unit discipline to begin with, frenzy is the right word – sees armed bands crazed by the poisonous elixir our power to bring about the obliteration of others delivers. All things, including human beings, become objects – objects to either gratify or destroy or both. Almost no one is immune. The contagion of the crowd sees to that.

Human beings are machine gunned and bombed from the air, automatic grenade launchers pepper hovels and neighbors with high-powered explosive devices and convoys race through Iraq like freight trains of death. These soldiers and Marines have at their fingertips the heady ability to call in air strikes and firepower that obliterate landscapes and villages in fiery infernos. They can instantly give or deprive human life, and with this power they became sick and demented. The moral universe is turned upside down. All human beings are used as objects. And no one walks away uninfected. War thrusts us into a vortex of pain and fleeting ecstasy. It thrusts us into a world where law is of little consequence, human life is cheap and the gratification of the moment becomes the overriding desire that must be satiated, even at the cost of another's dignity or life.

"A lot of guys really supported that whole concept that, you know, if they don't speak English and they have darker skin, they're not as human as us, so we can do what we want," said Josh Middleton, who served in the 82nd Airborne in Iraq. "And you know, when 20 year old kids are yelled at back and forth at Bragg and we're picking up cigarette butts and getting yelled at every day to find a dirty weapon. But over here, it's like life and death. And 40-year-old Iraqi men look at us with fear and we can – do you know what I mean? – we have this power that you can't have. That's really liberating. Life is just knocked down to this primal level of, you know, you worry about where the next food's going to come from, the next sleep or the next patrol and to stay alive."

"It's like you feel like, I don't know, if you're a caveman," he added. "Do you know what I mean? Just, you know, I mean, this is how life is supposed to be. Life and death, essentially. No TV. None of that bullshit."

It takes little in wartime to turn ordinary men into killers. Most give themselves willingly to the seduction of unlimited power to destroy, and all feel the peer pressure to conform. Few, once in battle, find the strength to resist. Physical courage is common on a battlefield. Moral courage is not.

Military machines and state bureaucracies, who seek to make us obey, seek also to silence those who return from war to speak the truth, to hide from a public eager for stories of war that fit the mythic narrative the essence of war which is death.

"The word 'Hadji' swiftly became a slur to refer to Iraqis, in much the same way 'gook' was used to debase the Vietnamese or 'rag head' is used to belittle those in Afghanistan. Soon those around him ridiculed 'Hadji food,' 'Hadji homes,' and 'Hadji music.'

Camilo Mejia, who eventually applied while still on active duty to become a conscientious objector, said the ugly side of American racism and chauvinism appeared the moment his unit arrived in the Middle East. Fellow soldiers instantly ridiculed Arab-style toilets because they would be "shitting like dogs." The troops around him treated Iraqis, whose language they did not speak and whose culture was alien, little better than animals. The word "Hadji" swiftly became a slur to refer to Iraqis, in much the same way "gook" was used to debase the Vietnamese or "rag head" is used to belittle those in Afghanistan. Soon those around him ridiculed "Hadji food," "Hadji homes," and "Hadji music." Bewildered prisoners, who were rounded up in useless and indiscriminate raids, were stripped naked, and left to stand terrified and bewildered for hours in the baking sun. They were subjected to a steady torrent of verbal and physical abuse. "I experienced horrible confusion," Mejia remembers, "not knowing whether I was more afraid for the detainees or for what would happen to me if I did anything to help them."

These scenes of abuse, which began immediately after the American invasion, were little more than collective acts of sadism. Mejia watched, not daring to intervene, yet increasingly disgusted at the treatment of Iraqi civilians. He saw how the callous and unchecked abuse of power first led to alienation among Iraqis and spawned a raw hatred of the occupation forces. When army







The shroud fell away from the body revealing a young man wearing only his pants. There was a bullet hole in his chest. "Damn, they really fucked you up, didn't they!?" the soldier laughed.

units raided homes, the soldiers burst in on frightened families, forced them to huddle in the corners at gun point, and helped themselves to food and items in the house.

"After we arrested drivers," he recalled, "we would choose whichever vehicles we liked, fuel them from confiscated jerry cans, and conduct undercover presence patrols in the impounded cars.

"But to this day I cannot find a single good answer as to why I stood by idly during the abuse of those prisoners except, of course, my own cowardice," he also notes.

Iraqi families were routinely fired upon for getting too close to check points, including an incident where an unarmed father driving a car was decapitated by a 50-caliber machine gun in front of his small son, although by then, Mejia notes, "this sort of killing of civilians had long ceased to arouse much interest or even comment." Soldiers shot holes into cans of gasoline being sold alongside the road and then tossed incendiary grenades into the pools to set them ablaze. "It's fun to shoot shit up," a soldier said. Some open fire on small children throwing rocks. And when improvised explosive devices go off the troops fire wildly into densely populated neighborhoods, leaving behind innocent victims who become, in the callous language of war, "collateral damage."

"We would drive on the wrong side of the highway to reduce the risk of being hit by an IED," Mejia said of the deadly roadside bombs. "This forced oncoming vehicles to move to one side of the road, and considerably slowed down the flow of traffic. In order to avoid being held up in traffic jams, where someone could roll a grenade under our trucks, we would simply drive up on sidewalks, running over garbage cans and even hitting civilian vehicles to push them out of the way. Many of the soldiers would laugh and shriek at these tactics."

At one point the unit was surrounded by an angry crowd protesting the occupation. Mejia and his squad opened fire on an Iraqi holding a grenade, riddling the man's body with bullets. Mejia checked his clip afterwards and determined that he fired 11 rounds into the young man. Units, he said, nonchalantly opened fire in crowded neighborhoods with heavy M-240 Bravo machine guns, AT-4 launchers and Mark 19s, a machine gun that spits out grenades.

"The frustration that resulted from our inability to get back at those who were attacking us," Mejia writes, "led to tactics that seemed designed simply to punish the local population that was supporting them."

He watched soldiers from his unit abuse the corpses of Iraqi dead. Mejia related how, in one incident, soldiers laughed as an Iraqi corpse fell from the back of a truck.

"Take a picture of me and this motherfucker," one of the soldiers who had been in Mejia's squad in third platoon said, putting his arm around the corpse.

The shroud fell away from the body revealing a young man wearing only his pants. There was a bullet hole in his chest.

"Damn, they really fucked you up, didn't they!?" the soldier laughed.

The scene, Mejia noted, was witnessed by the dead man's brothers and cousins. Senior officers, protected in heavily fortified compounds, rarely saw combat. They sent their troops on futile missions in the quest to be awarded Combat Infantry Badges. This recognition, Mejia notes, "was essential to their further progress up the officer ranks." This pattern meant that "very few high-ranking officers actually got out into the action, and lower-ranking officers were afraid to

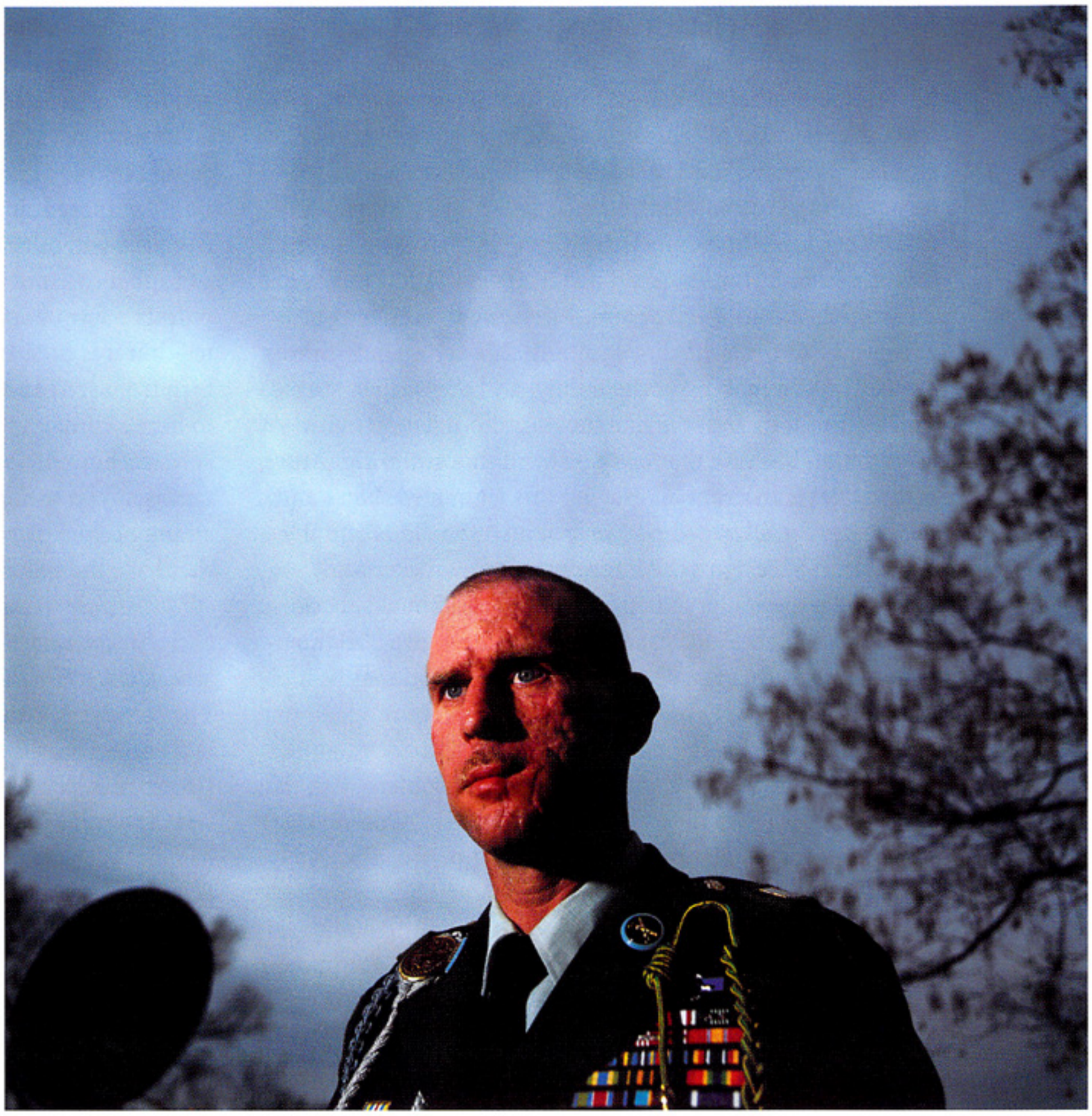
The scene, Mejia noted, was witnessed by the dead man's brothers and cousins. Senior officers, protected in heavily fortified compounds, rarely saw combat. They sent their troops on futile missions in the quest to be awarded Combat Infantry Badges.

contradict them when they were wrong." When the badges, bearing an emblem of a musket with the hammer dropped, resting on top of an oak wreath, were finally awarded, the commanders immediately brought in Iraqi tailors to sew the badges on the left breast pockets of their desert combat uniforms.

"This was one occasion when our leaders led from the front," Mejia noted bitterly. "They were among the first to visit the tailors to get their little patches of glory sewn next to their hearts."

The war breeds gratuitous and constant acts of violence.

"I mean, if someone has a fan, they're a white collar family," said Phillip Chrystal, who carried out raids on Iraqi homes in Kirkuk. "So we get started on this day, this one, in particular. And it starts with the psy ops [psychological operations] vehicles out there, you know, with the big speakers playing a message in Arabic or Farsi or Kurdish or whatever they happen to be saying, basically, saying put your weapons, if you have them, next to the front door in your house. Please come outside, blah, blah, blah, blah. And we had Apaches flying over for security, if they're needed, and it's also a good show of force. And we were running around, and we'd done a few houses by this point, and I was with my platoon leader, my squad leader and maybe a couple other people, but I don't really remember.



They tell us war is a soulless void. They have seen and tasted how war plunges us to barbarity, perversion, pain and an unchecked orgy of death.

"And we were approaching this one house, and this farming area, they're, like, built up into little courtyards," he said. "So they have like the main house, common area. They have like a kitchen and then, they have like a storage shed-type deal. And we were approaching, and they had a family dog. And it was barking ferociously, because it was doing its job. And my squad leader, just out of nowhere, just shoots it. And he didn't – mother fucker – he shot it and it went in the jaw and exited out. So I see this dog – and I'm a huge animal lover. I love animals – and this dog has like these eyes on it and he's running around spraying blood all over the place. And like, you know, the family is sitting right there with three little children and a mom and a dad horrified. And I'm at a loss for words. And so, I yell at him. I'm like what the fuck are you doing. And so, the dog's yelping. It's crying out without a jaw. And I'm looking at the family, and they're just scared. And so, I told them I was like fucking shoot it, you know. At least, kill it, because that can't be fixed. It's suffering. And I actually get tears from just saying this right now, but – and I had tears then, too, – and I'm looking at the kids and they are so scared. So I got the interpreter over with me and, you know, I get my wallet out and I gave them 20 bucks, because that's what I had. And, you know, I had him give it to them and told them that I'm so sorry that asshole did that. Which was very common. I don't know if it's rednecks or what, but they feel that shooting dogs is something that adds to one's manliness traits. I don't know. I had a big problem with that.

"Was a report ever filed about it?" he asked. "Was anything ever done? Any punishment ever dished out? No, absolutely not. He was a sycophant down to the T."

We make our heroes out of clay. We laud their gallant deeds and give them uniforms with colored ribbons on their chest for the acts of violence they committed or endured. They are our false repositories of glory and honor, of power, of self-righteousness, of patriotism and self-worship, all that we want to believe about ourselves. They are our plaster saints of war, the icons we cheer to defend us and make us and our nation great. They are the props of our civic religion, our love of power and force, our belief in our right as a chosen nation to wield this force against the weak and rule. This is our nation's idolatry of itself. And this idolatry has corrupted religious institutions, not only here but in most nations, making it impossible for us to separate the will of God from the will of the state.

Prophets are not those who speak of piety and duty from pulpits – few people in pulpits have much worth listening to – but it is the battered wrecks of men and women who return from Iraq and speak the halting words we do not want to hear, words that we must listen to and heed to know ourselves. They tell us war is a soulless void. They have seen and tasted how war plunges us to barbarity, perversion, pain and an unchecked orgy of death. And it is their testimonies alone that have the redemptive power to save us from ourselves.

Chris Hedges, who graduated from seminary at Harvard Divinity School, was a foreign correspondent for nearly two decades for The New York Times *and other publications. In his book,* War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning (Public Affairs, 2002), *Hedges gives an account of the 'intoxication' of war, which he covered in regions around the world, including El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia, Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, the Iraq, Bosnia and Kosovo. His most recent book is* American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America (Free Press, 2007).



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you do not abandon your own...

What does the chivalric tradition that originated in America's Civil War mean to the US today? Of all the scandals to come out of the Iraq war – Abu Ghraib, Haditha, the gang-rape and murder of 14 year old Abeer Qassim Hamza – the most dishonorable to date is the Bush administration's refusal to protect Iraqis who risked their lives by working as translators, interpreters, drivers for the US army. Targeted by insurgent groups, denied help from the US army, the Iraqis who cast their lot with America are being kidnapped and executed every day, and no news report or televised pleas of help have caused a stir in the American conscience.

This story of betrayal is nothing new. At the twilight of the Vietnam war, the US abandoned 3,300 of the 3,500 Vietnamese employees of the US Army, leaving them at the mercy of vengeful nationalists. Every war since, the US has brought war and lofty ideals of freedom and democracy to faraway lands, leaving a cruel fate to the locals who believed in them. Just like in Vietnam 40 years ago, America is demonstrating to the world that it has no honor, and that its word does not mean very much.

*As of February 2007, the US has opened its doors to 466 of the 2 million Iraqi refugees displaced since 2003. Sweden has accepted 70,000, Jordan 750,000.

Monsters And Their Children



The backpacking protagonist of 2006's Hostel, in the midst of being served up for a wealthy "torture tourist" at a black market facility in Slovakia.

by **Spring Ulmer**

My friends used to practice fainting. I would watch. One would cross his arms across his stomach, bend up and down, again and again, pumping up his heart. Then he'd stand and another friend would squeeze the wind from his throat, hands like a butterfly's wings, choking him until he collapsed into a wiggling animal. My friends frightened me. When I saw them like this, I didn't know who they were. I was 13. I understood little about sex, but I was unnerved by their movements under these airless spells.

Now I faint when no one pays attention to me. It is less shocking than other things I've tried: less shocking than dangling from a noose after taking a razor to my arm.

You wouldn't understand.

You, the man who ripped my stomach open. You, the man who designed the chair that keeps me from fainting from hunger. You, the man who won't admit to your fantasies. You say you are helping people, helping save lives. Your chairs weren't designed, you say, to do anything bad.

I have been in this cell more than four years. What have I done? I was an imam. I traveled. My Jihad? Did I have one? Was it Jihad of the soul or of the sword? How these ideas threaten you! You, in the middle of the country of gold, you who sits in your pig shit town twiddling your thumbs, because nothing else is going on.

I've learned a lot of English cuss words in prison. I've learned motherfucker, cunt, shithead, asshole. I have learned what it is like to stand upside down. You don't think this is possible, but I have learned. There are no steps that cannot be taken. There are only the numbers that keep adding up and subtracting. My daughter is eleven. My daughter with her curls, with her letters they let me read a long time ago. Where are you, Daddy? All the other girls at school have fathers! What they don't know is that I was always gone. I was never there for her. How do I live now? How do I live looking you in the eye across the ocean, knowing you manufactured my life to sit here, contained, knowing this is all there is. There is nothing more than this. Knowing.

I have opened my veins to you. I have given you my blood. What more do you want? Why keep me alive in this chair? What can I tell you? I don't know anything. What purpose do I serve? Once I traveled. I traveled to meet beautiful blonde women. I traveled to forget my broken heart. I traveled because my stomach hurt. I traveled and traveled. Now you keep me here in this chair, you keep me. Steadfast. You decide what I eat. You pump my stomach full of liquid nutrients and laxatives. I shit myself. I smell horrendous. You do this not to save me but to humiliate. I have been made to do this to myself. Who are you – the menace of dream? I cannot think of you with your gold eye in the middle of the country staring out, staring into my insides. NO. Leave me.

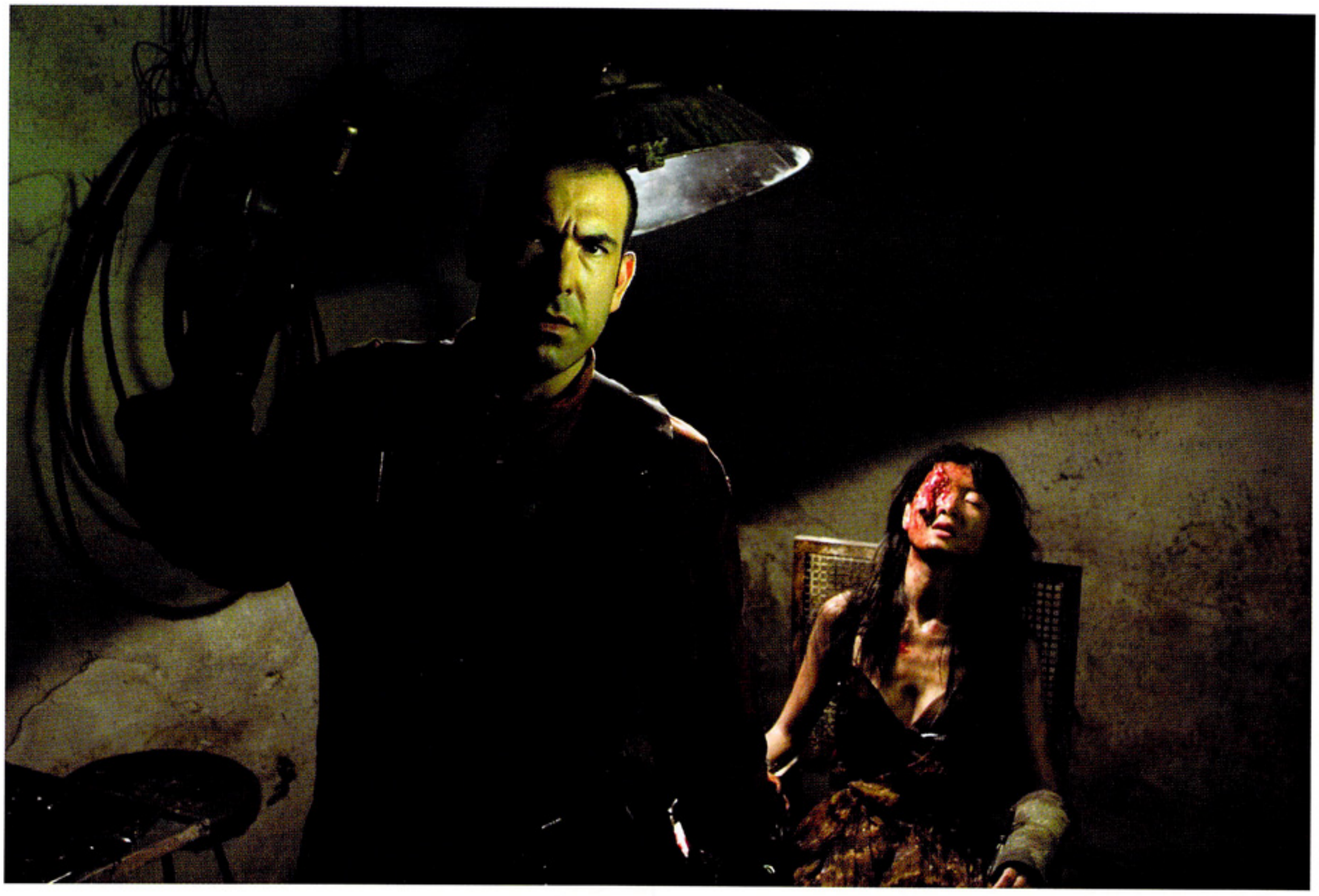
Josh assures me my case isn't out of the ordinary. He assures me. Of what? Of the fact that this is insane? What do I do to keep from going insane?

You, the man who made the chair – I look at your gold eye as if it was a star. I seek it. I find it, latch onto it when they are cuffing my arms, when they are velcroing my feet, my waist, my neck to the chair. I focus on that glint. And I spit it all back up.

And there in the interior of America, I imagine you toss and turn. I trouble you, don't I? I trouble you and your fancy hog ass. I make you squirm. I write things on my cell wall with blood. I take you down. I will take you down.

You thought I was weak. You thought you could break me. But I am sending a message to the world. I am telling them that you are crazy, that you have made me into your pig. You have kept me in this factory farm with its rap music, with its TV and chemical detergents. You have made me crawl out of my skin and hang myself here from the ceiling like a fly on gummy paper. Unfurled.

Do you know what the Middle East tastes like? I will tell you. It tastes like the most delicious feast. I had eaten so much. I had eaten and eaten – I had eaten to escape a bad marriage, a child who needed me and who I didn't know I needed until I was faced with this. Until I couldn't run any longer, until you strapped me here and fed me your shit, fed me all the poison you could think to administer and more. Kept feeding me. And only those who saw and cried, only those soldiers who had any soul inside were shocked.



A torturer is interrupted from his work on a kidnapped Japanese backpacker in Hostel. The film's unexpected success has already led one sequel.

Everyone else went on with their daily lives.

You make interest off your billion dollar prison industry. I make you money. I make you money by sitting in your chair while you force feed me as if I was a pig in a cartoon. You are the pimp and I am yours to abuse, to menstruate on, to force to watch pornographic acts. But you call me your child, yours to watch over, care for –

Once it was thought I was a mystic. What you don't know is that I still am.

As you slaughter your hogs, do you see yourself turning into a marshmallow? Do you see what happens when my daughter longs for me? You don't. You don't. You invent lies. You invent this chair with its weight lifting back, with its umbilical seat, with its upheaval. I am in the womb, your womb, the womb of some monster.

I always thought monsters couldn't reproduce.

I have struggled and struggled and you have stayed the same. I have been traveling interiorly while you travel in your police car at amazing speeds. I have been traveling out of my mind, my body, experiencing waves that have nothing to do with the material world.

Here in solitary, talking to myself, I miss the clouds more than anything. Isn't that strange? Isn't air the most amazing thing? I once lived in the Midwest, too. Bloomington. Rolling green. It sheltered me. But now I am so far gone. I would never tell you this to your face. I would never say, 'Yeah, look at me, see, there's no man left.' I would just tell you that you can break me, but I won't bend.

Why do I speak to you in my mind? Why do I direct my hate toward you, maker of my restraint? Not to the president or my own country (Bahrain) that does nothing?

Did you know I had an operation? Did you know that when I was a free man I was obese, convinced no one would love me? Did you know that then I attributed everything to weight? I hated my body. I couldn't stand standing. I didn't want to associate myself with myself. I just wanted to slip away, unnoticed. Now I want to reverse all those years, all those eyes on me. Did I really, back then, want to slip out of my skin? It's true that I opted for surgery. I am vain. Maybe even as vain as you. Only someone who has hated themselves

as much as I once hated myself knows why I would do such a thing. Only someone who has suffered from not being able to speak to anyone, to believe himself worthy, can understand. I don't know why I am trying to explain it to you. Now, again, I feel like I am waiting to be flayed and skinned. But unlike before, I am waiting for the knife as a savior. I am waiting for death. Back then, the knife was for life. I wished then to be skinned, so that I could continue; I needed to remove my skin, so that I could be free to walk down the street, to have people look at me and not think: grotesque.

The six who went and joined Osama, they joined of their own free will. You think I inspired them, incited them. You're wrong. I did no such thing. You think nothing I tell you is the truth. You say there is nothing worth believing. But I am telling you that those six went on their own. I simply told them they needed to stay true to something. I told them to war against themselves, and they did. But what would you know about such Jihad? All you know is pleasure. It's obvious. Your performance, your gold eye. All you know is what they tell you and all you believe is what they tell you. Have you ever once thought for yourself? You are so caustic. I don't know how to get you out of me. You keep polluting me and I keep swallowing it. I keep letting you. I keep trying to escape, no doubt.

You know after they stapled my stomach I was a new man. I walked around like something had changed. Like something profound had helped me to understand. It was internal – the operation. It wasn't external. So the change was happening inside me, physically, and it was changing me externally. Everyone could see it. It was magic. So I let it happen. I kept refusing to cower. And soon ladies were watching. They liked me more than they liked you. They were watching and I was wearing my blue sweater, I would wear it and I would smile. I knew, you see, who I was, I knew this wasn't the real me. I knew there was another self, another body. And here? You want to know who I've become? No. You wouldn't have the slightest clue.

Small disciplines of grace take over, telling me who I am. I can't explain it, really. I have to listen. There have been so many before me, those who have starved to prove a point. I am only asking you to remember me, that's really the point of this imaginary conversation.

They haven't figured out what to do with our bodies. They haven't figured it out. Will they freeze us and put us in plastic bags? Will our bruises show? Will some day forensics find us and tell the story, blow by blow? Or will they burn the evidence? Will they shred it, will they refuse it?

You live in a town where brown people kill hogs and build a new jail for you. And what do you do? You sit in your glass office and look at a piece of bullet shattered glass and picture a brown face. You sit there with the plastic hog in front of you, the one you call the biting sow, the one that knows you are doing wrong, the one that reprimands you. You call it an award. You give your fellow cops awards for misbehaving. You say this is a way to keep everyone honest. I say this is a way to hide forever in your fraud. I am so sick. Look at my arm. Look at my leg. Look at the scar across my neck. Do you think I am just a suicidal maniac?

I cared that Josh – my lawyer – knew, because he could get my word out. I cared and so I jumped into that noose and opened a vein. I have tried to die 12 times. You have stood by. You have closed your glinting eye. There in the middle of America. You have pretended like you didn't see. You looked elsewhere, went on vacation. You go to your garage and refashion the chair. What if it wasn't padded here and here? What if the mentally ill didn't need it? What if you could redesign it to serve its real purpose?

Once I was a large man. I weighed more than you do with your bulletproof vest on. I weighed more than the saints weigh when they are cast in bronze. I weighed enough to feed several villages. I am exaggerating. I weighed 261 pounds. Now I weigh almost nothing, but my number – no joke – is 261. I am now a number. Like all those who have been numbers before me. When your children grow up, they will ask you about these concentration camps – and you will say, 'Oh yes, what a mistake!' You will explain your own innocence. You will say you designed the chair to save people. Will your children believe you? What will happen when they befriend someone at school whose father – a detainee – killed himself? My daughter? You think your son will meet my daughter? I wouldn't allow her near him.

If I was an elephant you would electrocute me. You'd hook me up to voltage rather than feed me. No, I'm wrong. Did you know all along that food would kill me? How did you know? Did you see my insides come unstapled when they kicked me? Or was the sound of my stomach tearing audible to you? I thought only I could hear that sound – like water turned to steam, evaporating into the air –

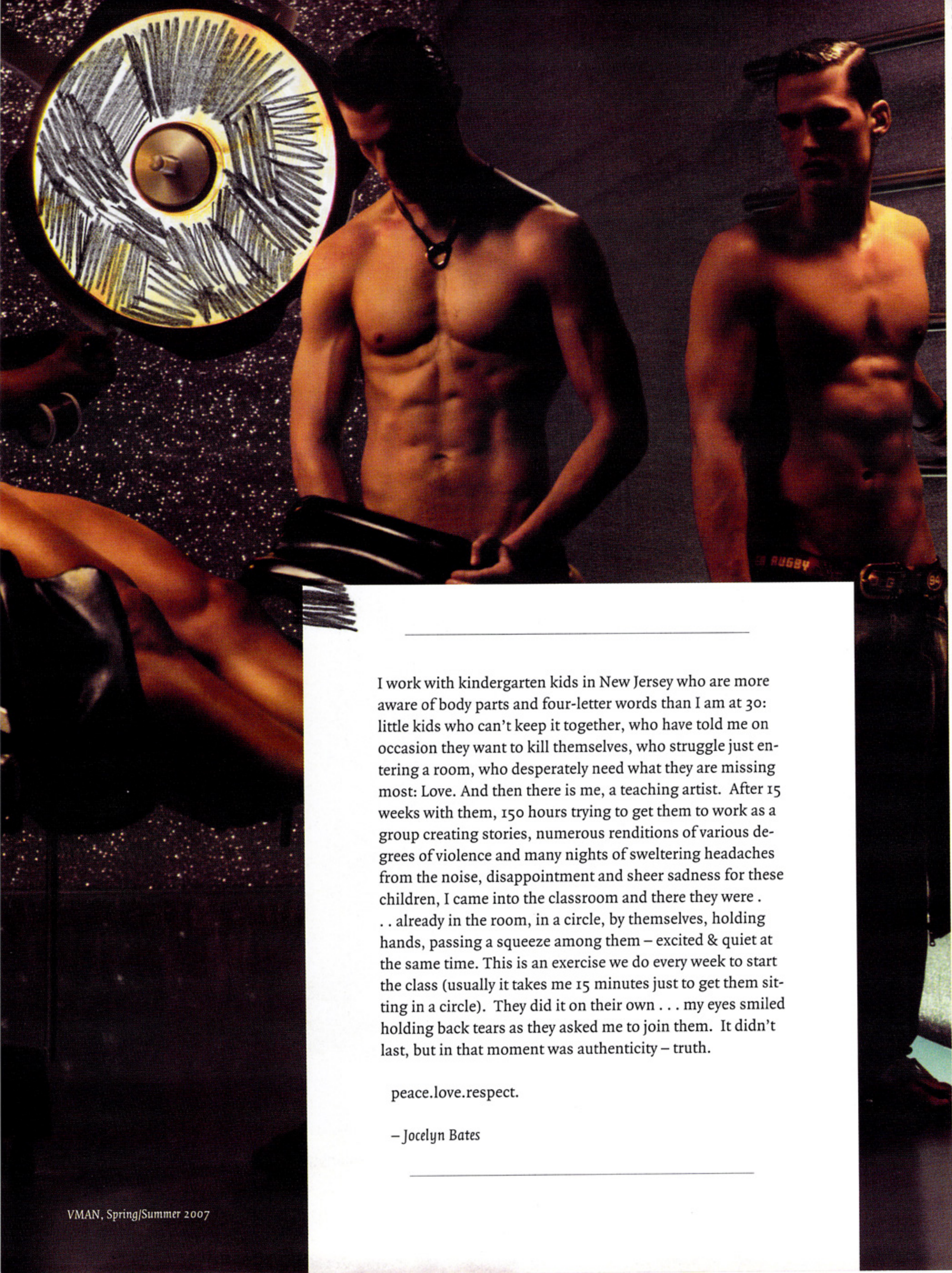
Spring Ulmer grew up in the backwoods of Vermont without electricity; her book, Benjamin's Spectacles, *is forthcoming from Kore Press this spring.*

DELEUZE

GUATTARI

D&G

DOLCE&GABBANA



I work with kindergarten kids in New Jersey who are more aware of body parts and four-letter words than I am at 30: little kids who can't keep it together, who have told me on occasion they want to kill themselves, who struggle just entering a room, who desperately need what they are missing most: Love. And then there is me, a teaching artist. After 15 weeks with them, 150 hours trying to get them to work as a group creating stories, numerous renditions of various degrees of violence and many nights of sweltering headaches from the noise, disappointment and sheer sadness for these children, I came into the classroom and there they were . . . already in the room, in a circle, by themselves, holding hands, passing a squeeze among them – excited & quiet at the same time. This is an exercise we do every week to start the class (usually it takes me 15 minutes just to get them sitting in a circle). They did it on their own . . . my eyes smiled holding back tears as they asked me to join them. It didn't last, but in that moment was authenticity – truth.

peace.love.respect.

– Jocelyn Bates

VMAN, Spring/Summer 2007



The Spartan heroes of Warner Bros' 300, a historical fantasy that brought accusations of racism, homophobia and fascism upon its release this spring. The bodies of their vanquished foes litter the background.



The Persian Emperor Xerxes – depicted as a gigantic androgynous warmonger with a predilection for eye-shadow and getting people to kneel before him – vents his frustration with the unstoppable virility of the titular 300 Spartans.



The deformed Spartan outcast Ephialtes, who betrays his people to the Persians by revealing a secret path through Spartan lines.



Stabbed, shot, beaten, bodies strewn out over clear plastic wrap – the grisly glamor of aspiring models was caught on the 2007 photo shoot of the hugely popular America's Next Top Model. Further adding insult to faux injuries, many of the shots have "cute" backstories about one girl killing another out of jealousy.



CHRISTOPH BANGERT/LAIF

When you visit the dump in Baghdad, you might find strewn along plastic bags and styrofoam containers the bodies of a few dead Iraqis. Some of them may be half-eaten by stray dogs. I stopped and stared at the body of this one guy with his hands tied behind his back with a cord; he was probably good-looking in life. You turn him over and open his shirt, and the flesh underneath his nipple looks like it was pinched and twisted around with something burning hot.

All along his back you'll see a bunch of reddish horizontal welts, the skin cracked and bleeding near the chest, as if he'd been whipped with a heavy cord. What stands out the most, though, is the cluster of small, circular wounds on his knees; He was knee-capped, not with a gun, but the holes were made with a drill – drilling seems to be the new standard for torture in the new Iraq. There are other details, like cigarette burns and broken ribs, but what actually killed him were the bullets fired into his head, at close range, probably by someone standing over him as he lay on the ground.

He may have been a collaborator – or a terrorist. We'll never know. Whatever he did, or didn't do, he ended up here, in this dump, just another victim of the violent culture in which we live.

Cultural P**sych**o*sis*

What do we win from the game of sweet nothings?

This spring, as a blood-splattered historical fantasy by the name of *300* hacked and slashed its way through a few box office records, the sound of sharpening knives could also be heard emanating from the audience. Somehow, amid all of the glorious money-raking, the film had managed the ignominious honor of ranking among the most reviled pieces of entertainment in recent memory.

It seems that quite a few people took issue with the film's depiction of ancient history, namely the Battle of Thermopylae of 480 BCE, during which an alliance of outnumbered Greeks made their heroic last stand against the expansionist Persian Empire. Iranian ex-pats in Canada and the US launched online petitions condemning the film, while a healthy international assortment of film critics and pundits took to lobbing about some thoroughly ugly words – nasties like "race-baiting," "homophobic," "war propaganda," "fascist art," "white supremacist" and "neocon wet dream." Over in Iran, the regime-friendly Tehran-based newspaper *Ayandeh-No* pretty well summed up the political mood with a single no-nonsense headline: "Hollywood declares war on Iranians."

Those responsible for the film reacted with incredulity – or at least feigned it convincingly. In an interview with *CBR News*, director Zack Snyder scoffed, "It's a graphic novel movie about a bunch of guys that are stomping the snot out of each other. As soon as you start to frame it like that [i.e. with political analysis], it becomes clear that you've missed the point entirely." Warner Brothers issued its own statement to calm the rabble, explaining that it "developed this film purely as a fictional work with the sole purpose of entertaining audiences; it is not meant to disparage an ethnicity or culture or make any sort of political statement."

Yet disparage it did, precipitating a bona fide international incident and leaving critics insisting – beyond all reason, apparently – that a film drawn from world history could actually mean something. Where were these spoilsports getting their silly ideas?

Old legends don't get retold unless they can be pressed into some new service, especially if those retellings cost tens of million of dollars to launch. Naturally, the chief purpose here is profit. Second to that is entertainment. Look at the systematic way that *300* distorts those few things that we do know about ancient Sparta to suit the tastes of contemporary audiences. For one, the Spartans – our heroes – have neatly dropped the time-honored institution of educational and military pederasty from their repertoire (that grotty burden falls on the sissy Athenians instead). They also emerge staunchly against slavery, whereas the real Sparta was, as you might have guessed, a rather brutal apartheid state propped up by firmly entrenched slave labour.

Taken alone, these distortions are merely unsavory and speak to the studio's disdain for their infantalized audience more than anything. But when you add to this the sight of an elite cadre of athletic, virile, white patriots pitted against the gibbering pan-Asian hordes who constitute the Persian army – and who, coincidentally, are either faceless slaves, brown, black, horridly deformed, or sexually ambiguous in a

slithering sort of way – and you are left with a grimly straightforward formula, one that equates Sparta with the West and civilization and freedom, versus Persia and the (Middle) East and barbarism and oppression. Pile on top of that a subplot about a traitorous fifth-column of careerist politicians who care not a whiff for the glory of Sparta, then pepper it all with "fuck, yeah!" political sloganeering ("Freedom isn't free," opines Queen Gorgo), and you would be forgiven for concluding that Bush's speechwriters had concocted the whole thing.

They didn't, of course. The unsexy reality is that this type of vainglorious, xenophobic war-is-honor tripe doesn't require the collusion of a shadowy ministry of information. All that's needed is the one-two combo of artistic pandering and the wilful, almost joyous abnegation of all social and political responsibility. The kicker is that those responsible get to make careers off of their propaganda at the same time as they excuse themselves from it by claiming they're just giving the masses what they want – oh, and it doesn't really mean anything anyway.

This isn't breaking news. We've had plenty of years to grow accustomed to these meaningless little performances, these purportedly harmless, sweet nothings that we whisper into each other's ears. We see their workings in our burgeoning credit cards bills; in the groaning shelves and impossibly skimpy price tags at the local megamart; in the fact that gasoline remains miraculously cheaper than bottled water; in the very idea of a modern, surgical war that leaves all of the good guys unscathed; in the way that brands speak to us much more clearly than workmanship, materials and the general provenance of our goods. This is the way of a solipsistic universe, where our everyday actions and entertainments have no consequence, where we may consume what we want whenever we want in whatever quantity we please, where we may buy on credit today and not pay a cent back tomorrow.

But this is make-believe. As the Iranian reaction to *300* illustrates, this refutation of responsibility, this unwillingness to accept that our parlour games mean anything, is untenable, a delusion. It amounts to a sort of collective psychosis, and the global infrastructure built in service of this psychosis will inevitably implode – if isn't toppled by those left on the outside first.

When Seung-Hui Cho – the student who murdered 32 at Virginia Tech in April – took a couple of hours out of his shooting spree to record and mail his parting words to NBC, we hoped for an eloquent, if deranged, diatribe that would help decipher his monstrous crimes. At the very least, we would have settled for an honest outpouring of inarticulate rage. Instead, we got amateur theatrics, a lame PR tape of Cho posing as some badass hybrid between Jesus, Che Guevara and The Punisher. The performance is less than compelling, in large part because his weedy, nerdy body could not adequately fulfill the demands of the role.

In the end, through all of the paraphrased movie dialogue, perhaps the only moment in Cho's multimedia manifesto that provides any further insight is his reference to the "martyrs Eric and Dylan," the perpetrators of the Columbine High School massacre. In drawing that line of connection, Cho correctly places himself within a dynasty of losers who, while grappling with pangs of hazy injustice, carried out heinous acts of violence — armed with unrestricted guns and unlimited ham-fisted clichés about righteous reciprocity – all in the name of principals that they never quite bothered to formulate beyond their own unexamined sense of entitlement. Like the juvenile fictions they aped, their deaths would be spectacular, yet very empty.

Reacting to *300*, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took advantage of his Iranian New Year's address to talk about Hollywood's campaign of "psychological warfare" against his country. Perhaps he didn't realize that we've been fighting that campaign against ourselves for some time now. It's how we found ourselves locked in the messy throes of an increasingly vague total war. If we're not vigilant, it's also how we may find ourselves emulating Seung-Hui Cho, martyrs for nebulous ideals that we were never able to fully articulate or understand.

– *Clayton Dach*


amarcho

ALEC SOTH/MAGNUM



Years ago, when I lived in Washington DC., I was called for jury duty. I was selected for a group that would be whittled down to what they hoped would comprise the actual jury. The judge asked us some general questions as a group, and told us to raise our hands if our response to any of the questions was negative. One question was, "If I told you that X was the law, would any of you have a problem following that?" I raised my hand. After lunch break, those who had raised their hands were individually questioned by the judge, prosecutor, and defense attorney. The judge asked me again, "If I told you the law was A-B-C, then you might still see it as D-E-F?" I said that if "D-E-F" were just, then yes, I'd rather have true justice than superficial law. To which the judge looked at the lawyers, and said, "Gentlemen, I think we call that anarchy." I smiled. Exactly. - *Kristine Mattis*



LAURA RUSSELL

Jazz and Jihad: the discourse of solidarity

– speech by Gilad Atzmon at the University of Denver, 13 April 2007

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For many years I considered America as my promised land. As a young jazz musician I was pretty convinced that sooner or later I would end up living in New York City. My Jerusalem was Downtown Manhattan and of course my holy scriptures were the old Blue Note vinyls. My Rabbis were named Coltrane, Bird, Miles, Duke, Dizzy, Bill Evans and naturally, there were many others. I was convinced of this reality for a while, and in fact, it took time before I realized that jazz was far more than mere music. It took a while before I gathered that jazz was something else, that it was actually a form of resistance. Nowadays I realize that jazz is no different from Jihad. Accordingly, playing jazz is my personal Jihad. I do grasp that some people in this room may already find my ideas nostalgic, some may even be convinced that I am either totally deluded or just out of my mind. I can live with it. I do realize that 'things have changed', they've changed for you as much as they've changed for me. I do realize that jazz is not exactly a form of resistance anymore. May I mention that America isn't my promised land either. In fact, at the time of writing this talk, I wasn't even sure whether I would be allowed entry into your country. As much as jazz, the classical music of America, has been a call for freedom, America is not a free place anymore. I often argue that before liberating others, it is the American people who should first liberate themselves. I am pretty sure that sooner or later they will.

Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine

I have been participating in some public debates lately concerning the common denominator between Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. I'm glad to mention that it is rather noticeable that more and more people are now happy to admit what some of us realized years ago. The Palestinians, the Iraqis and the Afghanis are paying a very dear price for the Ziocentric shift within the Anglo-American decision-makers circuit. Seemingly, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine are just the aperitif for an endless feast. The Ziocons have some big appetite to satisfy. The same lobbies that led America towards this disastrous invasion in Iraq and Afghanistan are now doing whatever they can to push America towards intervention in Iran and Syria. For those few who still fail to realize it, America has been operating officially as an Israeli mission force. It currently fights the last sovereign pockets of Muslim resistance.

Often enough, the true aim of the Zionist lobbies is concealed. Instead the Zionist lobbies promote some righteous phony humanitarian alternatives. The American Jewish Committee (AJC), for instance, is aggressively lobbying against human rights abuse in Iran and Darfur. Since human rights issues are really close to my heart, I find myself wondering whether the Jewish organization shouldn't rather be concentrating on the colossal war crimes that are daily repeated by Israel in Palestine. Rather occasionally we read about AIPAC equating Iran and Syria with Nazi Germany. Again, someone should remind the Zionist lobbyists that actually it is Israel, the "Jews Only State", that happens to be the one and only ideological remnant of racist nationalism.

Three weeks ago the *Palestine Chronicle* made an on-line poll. It asked the following question: Does the Israel Lobby control US policy on the Middle East?' Needless to mention, no one would even have dared raising such a question five years ago. Now this question is asked repeatedly and as it seems, people aren't shying off from telling what they really think. 80 percent said yes, 15 percent said no, and 4 percent were not sure. Looking at these results points to the reality many want us to deny. The vast majority of English-speaking Palestinians, Palestinian solidarity campaigners and anti-war activists are now ready to admit that the Israel Lobby controls US policy in the Middle East. We are ready to accept the fact that America operates as an Israeli mission force. America straightens the line with Israeli interests and sacrifices its sons and daughters maintaining Israeli regional hegemony.

But here is an interesting twist. I do not intend to talk to

you about Zionised America. I want to believe that the majority of Palestinian supporters and anti-war activists in this room know far more about it than me. I would like to try taking the discussion further. I would like to elaborate on the notion of solidarity and empathy.

Those who are familiar with my writings know that I am not exactly a political scientist. I am not interested in politics and I am even far less interested in politicians who, generally speaking, evoke nothing but a strong sense of repulsion in me.

Rather than politics per se, it is humanity and the notion of humanism that I am interested in. Often I find myself wondering what being in the world may entail. And I better admit it; I am puzzled by the fact that as a society, as a collective bunch of individuals, we have managed to continuously fail to act for the people of Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan. I think that this very collective failure is in itself an alarming message. Thus, rather than looking into the crimes committed by Blair, Bush and the Ziocons, I am becoming gradually interested in the general Western apathy. To be more precise, I would argue that the common denominator between Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine is our collective indifference to a crime that is committed on our behalf and in our names.

As some of us may remember, in the days leading to the doomed illegal invasion of Iraq, the anti-war movement was extremely successful in mobilizing millions of people into protest. We saw them in every capital. They were calling Blair and Bush to withdraw their military plans. Millions of people questioned the sickening Anglo-American intelligence hoax. We could all see through the lies, we could all foresee the emerging crime, we were outraged, and we were convinced that we were doing the right thing. Yet, strangely enough, just four years later, with hundreds of thousands dead, with millions of casualties, with many millions of displaced people. When it is clear that everything went as wrong as it possibly could, when it is openly established that "the danger of Iraq's WMDs" was nothing but a lie, not very many care about it all anymore. Now when the grim prophecy turns into reality of genocide with no end, we are collectively sinking into apathy. What are the logos behind this collective indifference, why did we lose interest? Why don't we fight? Why aren't we a mass movement?

I am not so sure whether I have the exact answers at my disposal, yet, I may be able to throw some light on the issue.

Cultural Clash

I am inclined to admit that the notion of Cultural Clash has indeed some deep meanings especially when it comes to the discourse of solidarity. Naturally, we tend to expect the subject of our solidarity to endorse our views while dumping his own. As much as Blair and Bush insist upon democratizing the Muslim world, we, the so-called left humanists have our own various agendas for the region and its people. In Europe some archaic Marxists are convinced that 'working class politics' is the only viable outlook of the conflict and its solution. Some other deluded socialists and egalitarians are talking about liberating the Muslims of their religious traits. The cosmopolitans within the solidarity movement would suggest to Palestinians that nationalism and national identity belongs to the past. Noticeably, many of us love Muslim and Arabs as long as they act as white, post-enlightenment Europeans. In other words, we love Muslims as long as they stop being Muslims.

For those who fail to realize, I may as well mentioned that 'working class politics' has nothing to do with Palestine, Iraq or Afghanistan. For those who fail to see the obvious truth, I may as well mention that the industrial revolution has never made it to Gaza. Furthermore, the landslide victory of the Hamas proves beyond doubt that Palestinians are not exactly on the verge of dropping Islam. The million Shias that protested in Najaf last Monday were not exactly secular Arabs either. It is crucial to mention that the Palestinian struggle is a national struggle. The million Iraqi Shias who followed their Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr last Monday were overtly burning American flags while raising their own Iraqi ones as high as they could. In other words, we have good reason to believe that they may hold a consistent and genuine nationalist vision of their conflict and its resolution. Again, to expect Palestinians or Iraqis to become secular, cosmopolitan and working class ideologists is to expect Arabs and Muslims to act as European Marxists. It has noting to do with solidarity; it is actually nothing but projection. We project our solipsistic worldviews on others.

Self-centered activism

In Lacanian terminology, love means loving oneself through the other. At large, our notion of solidarity is not much different: we run a constant risk of performing solidarity with ourselves through the suffering of Palestinians and Iraqis. We are at risk of using Palestinians and Iraqis as an approval of our greatness. Alternatively I would suggest that to support the other means to accept otherness, to accept that which you may never grasp. To accept otherness is to let in the unknown and the unfamiliar. To support Palestine is to back the Hamas and to support Iraq is to back the Iraqi resistance and liberation struggle. Simply speaking, to show solidarity is to support and accept other people and their will.

But somehow, instead of doing just that, in most cases we

happen to transform our subject of solidarity into a fetish. We self indulge with peace ideologies at the expense of other people's pain. We instrumentally use the cry of the other as a reassurance of our own goodness. This may explain why so many of us have lost interest in Iraq and Palestine. If all we are interested in is just making love to ourselves, Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran and Syria are more than replaceable. As it happens, once in a while we may show up in mass demonstrations and then just fade away into apathy for a decade or so.

We get away with it

Why do we fade away? Because we get away with it. Legally speaking, America and Britain are responsible for the colossal carnage in Iraq. Bearing in mind the fact that America and Britain are democracies and adding the embarrassing fact that the people of these two 'great democracies' have re-elected war criminals, leaves no other option but admitting a collective guilt. To a certain extent, every American and British citizen is liable for the crimes in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon and Afghanistan. Yet this state of criminality means very little to most of us. Americans and Brits at least for the time being simply get away with it.

America has lost 3,000 of its sons and daughters in the Iraqi war. As much as I feel sorry for those who lost their beloved, for a superpower the size of America, such a scale of loss is nothing but a negligible casualty rate. In comparison, on D-Day, America lost more or less the same number of combatants in a few hours. In modern warfare, superpowers are mainly engaged in killing innocent people from afar. America doesn't risk its soldiers. It doesn't provide occupied Iraq and Afghanistan with even elementary security. Seemingly, the American Generals realize that this would cost lives of their troops. How come the Americans fail to provide security? They simply get away with it. Why are we sinking into apathy? More or less because of the same reason, we get away with it.

A bridge too far

As I am getting to the end of my talk, I may conclude that supporting Muslims and Jihad is probably a bridge too far for most Westerners. The typical Westerner doesn't know how to bridge the gap between 'materialism' and 'Jihad' or between 'self-loving' and 'martyrdom'. We happen to regard our lives as a precious gift with an immense value. We submitted to the post-enlightenment notion of individuality and individualism. Succumbing to the school of orthodox rationalism we believe in the ultimate power of reason. We adore science and admire technology. We are libidinally aroused by electronic gadgets.

Seemingly, spirit and beauty means very little to us unless attached to a commodity. In our Americanized reality, existence means market value. Yet, spirit of resistance and beauty are invaluable. I may suggest that we will never be able to fully understand what the Palestinian and Iraqi struggle means to its people unless we liberate ourselves from our narrow material vision of reality. We can never grasp people who sacrifice the ultimate unless we acknowledge that there is far more to life than just life. We can never understand Iraqi insurgency and the Palestinian liberation struggle unless we try to understand what soil may mean to people who refuse to get drunk on Coca-Cola.

For me, Jihad and jazz are very similar forms of commitment.

The search for the meaning of solidarity is a personal issue. I believe that the meaning of solidarity is probably a very dynamic notion. I am starting to realize that within the current structure of affairs, the left who was pretty effective in mobilizing anti-imperial campaigns for years, may not provide anything for Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq. The left, being a rational, post-enlightenment outlook, has its problem to solve with Islam and religious devotion. I hope that I am wrong here. I can see some isolated islands of left dialectic thinkers are ready to acknowledge that Muslim resistance may as well convey an alternative vision of reality and resistance.

I can speak for myself. For me, Jihad and jazz are very similar forms of commitment. For me, the generations of Black Americans who sacrificed everything for the sake of beauty and resistance were actually engaged in a holy war. For me it was Bird, Max Roach, Dizzy, Coltrane and others who went far beyond the American dream of materialism and market value. Jazz was their voice of freedom. Jazz was their call for a change. Jazz was an ideology, a spirit, and a way of living as well as dying. To be a jazz musician is to fight for beauty, to create and recreate, to construct and deconstruct, to question while knowing that answers may not be available for a while. To play jazz is to get lost deliberately. To play jazz is to leave the self behind.

Gilad Atzmon is a London-based jazz musician, writer and activist. His books have been translated into 22 languages. <gilad.co.uk>



Pause
Jean-Pierre Khazem

Individuals and whole cultures set

Spiritually Ablaze

by **Kono Matsu**

For better or for worse, we're in the endgame now – all six-and-a-half billion of us living through one of the wildest, most psychotic moments in human history, belatedly trying to stop the sea levels from rising, the war on terror from escalating and our mood disorders from spinning out of control. The next 20 years will be a last ditch attempt to pull out of this deadly eco-psycho-politico struggle. It will be a fight to the finish against materialism, individualism, selfishness, decadence, opulence, corruption and greed. We'll have to pull down many more Iron Curtains and Berlin Walls and create many more Mahatma Gandhis, Nelson Mandelas and Martin Luther Kings. Can we do it? Are we up to the task? Are there enough charged-up people, communities, businesses, societies and religions out there for humanity to pull through?



Established in the seventh century as a religion to unify warring tribes under One God, Islam has paradoxically come to be seen as a divisive force in the world today. With over 1.3 billion believers worldwide, Islam continues to be largely misunderstood in the West. Despite their minority status in most Muslim countries, the Shiites are rising to become major actors in global politics.



Islam may be the fastest-growing religion in the world, but Christianity continues to dominate the geopolitical scene. Church attendance in the US has reached record highs, while political discourses are infused with religious language. While fewer Europeans than ever are attending church, Christianity makes up for the losses in developing nations: today, nearly half of all religious people in Africa are Christians.

One looming dark cloud over the horizon of Christianity, however, is its inability to own up to its mistakes: Pope John Paul talked about his "hurt," Benedict about his "devastation," but the Vatican has never accepted full responsibility for its role in colonialism or the sexual abuse of its young children by its priests. By refusing to face its moral dilemmas head on, the Catholic Church and Christianity as a whole may have dealt itself a blow which will affect worshippers for generations to come.



Unlike Sunni Islam, which is marked by tradition and legalism, Shia Islam breathes with passion. The celebration of Ashura, which takes place on the tenth day of the Muharram (first month on the Islamic calendar), baffles many non-Muslim observers with its intensity. The bloody rites of self-flagellation and laceration are a re-enactment of the Battle of Kerbala, in which Hussein, grandson the son of the prophet Mohammad, fought to defend the right of the Prophet's family to hold the title of the Caliph, or God's representative on earth.

Hussein's was a lost cause to begin with, yet his protest sparked the subversive stance that has come to symbolize Shiite Muslims – that it was more honorable to die for one's belief than to live complacently with injustice. It is the surging spirit of the Shiites that has inspired Muslims throughout the Middle East.



Europe has always been ablaze with ideas. Lately, it has come up with some of the best environmental policies in the world. Politically, it has exactly what the US and the UK under Bush and Blair lack: a sense of humility and a deep respect for human rights. Unfortunately, Europe currently lacks the dynamism to inspire the rest of the world. Secularism has trumped the spiritual – the churches are empty, while the mosques are full. Once looked up to as a beacon of enlightenment, Europe now needs a spiritual renaissance to help it survive in these turbulent times.

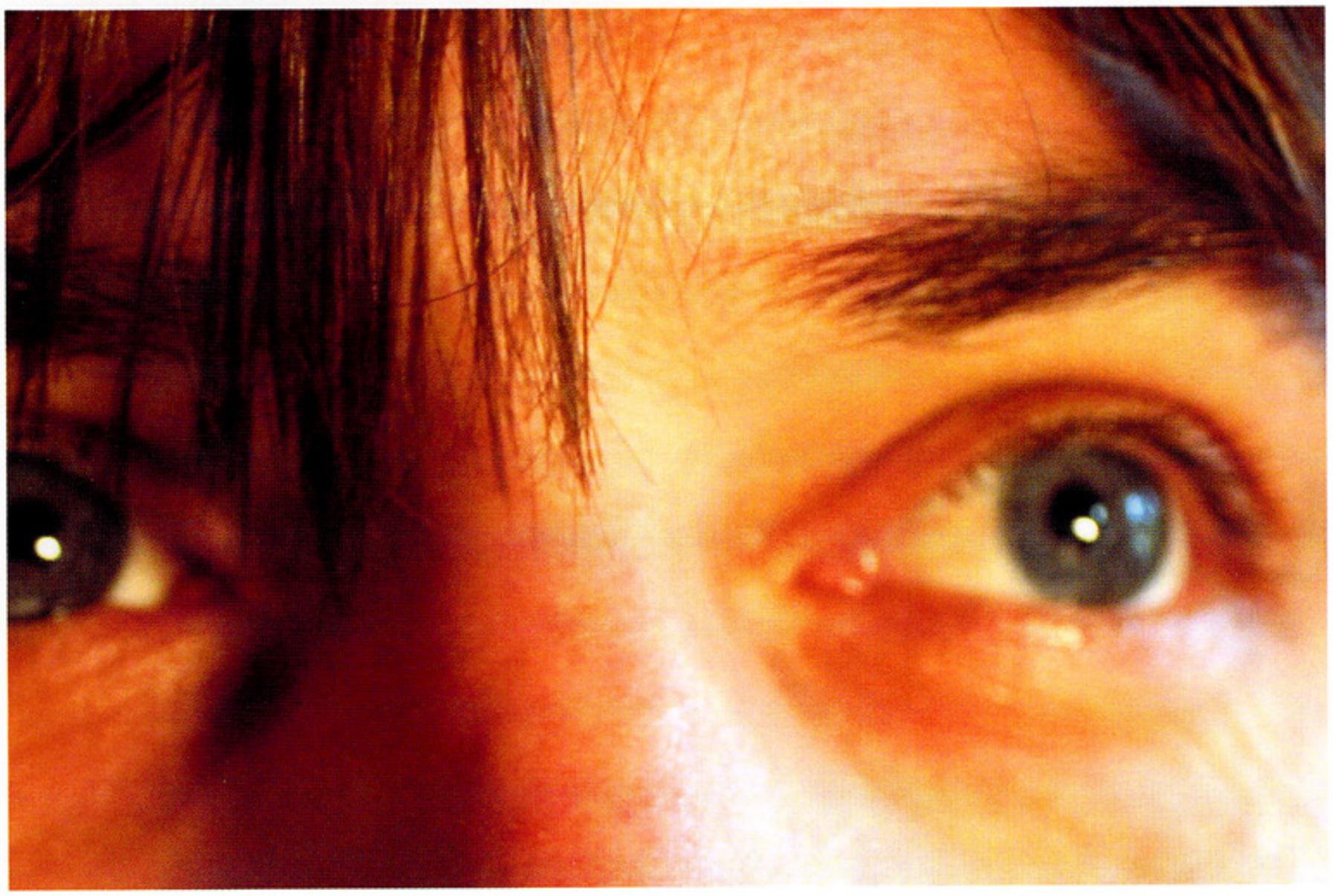


At the heart of Japan lies Shinto, a religion of deep nature worship. Japan has a profound sense of group solidarity nurtured by living together for thousands of years on an island largely disconnected from the rest of the world. If the global economy crashed tomorrow, Japan's team spirit would see her through, while the individualism-based cultures of the West would be in danger of collapsing in hubris. But Japan is passing through a spiritual hole right now – it is torn between Western cool and its traditional past. Japan's big mistake after World War II was selling its soul to the West, along with its cars and computers.

China is riding an unprecedented wave of dynamism, displaying the kind of dizzy optimism and burst of freedom that societies often experience when emerging out of a long period of repression. And yet, there are abundant signs that something's not right. Extreme social inequality, government corruption, pollution on an unimaginable scale, and the brutal repression of free speech, notably in the state's persecution of Tibetan Buddhists and Falun Gong practitioners. In a recent interview with *The Economist*, the Dalai Lama had this insight about the spiritual void in modern China: "[President Hu Jintao's] constant emphasis on a 'harmonious society' suggests that something is missing . . . sooner or later, a spiritual or moral culture will have to come to fill an internal emptiness." He points to the communist party's "radical atheism" as the dark void, the moral vacuum at heart of current Chinese culture.



America has a dynamic pioneer spirit and can-do culture of rugged individualism that attracts and inspires people from all over the world. And a good proportion of Americans still believe in God, heaven and hell. But America's dark side is the unbridled, me-first consumerism, the bloated sense of personal entitlement, the huge number of people on drugs, the random violence — all the sickness-of-the-soul fallout of a consumer society run amuck.



Faith: the confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing. Be it in God, or in an ideal, people with a strong conviction in something larger than themselves are able to take extraordinary action and make personal sacrifices for their cause.

"I want to be able to live the life of a human being," said Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya in an interview with *The Guardian* in 2004, "Where every individual is respected, in my lifetime." That life was cut short by a bullet to the head two years later, as she was assassinated for her criticism of Putin's regime and of the brutality of Russian troops in the Chechen war. Politkovskaya's murder galvanized the international media, helping to shine a spotlight on the very troubles in her country that her killers had tried to silence her from reporting.

Born into a life of comfort among Russia's privileged elite, Politkovskaya fought relentlessly for justice and accountability through her investigative journalism at the *Novaya Gazeta*. Constantly in the line of fire for her criticism of Putin's government, Politkovskaya held fervently to her belief in human rights. Her battle was fought on two fronts – one against the repressive government, another against an indifferent and largely unresponsive public.

Only three months after Politkovskaya's death, Armenian-Turkish editor Hrant Dink was shot dead outside his office in January by a young Turkish ultra-nationalist. Put on trial three times for "denigrating Turkish national identity," Dink was devoted to exposing the genocide of Armenians by the Turkish army during World War I. Both Politkovskaya and Dink were aware that they could one day be killed for their beliefs. Yet they their dream of a world in which any individual – Russian or Chechnyan, Turkish or Armenian – may live with dignity and freedom, could not be silenced by hate mail and threats on their life. In death, the two writers demonstrated the lengths to which some people are willing to go in the pursuit of truth and justice.

First Lieutenant Ehren Watada unleashed a storm of controversy in 2006 when he became the first commissioned officer – and highest ranking member of the military – to publicly refuse deployment for the war in Iraq. "It is my conclusion as an officer of the armed forces that the war in Iraq is not only morally wrong but a horrible breach of American law," said Watada in his public statement, which he gave wearing a business suit rather than his military uniform. He took his stand after researching the background of the Iraq war and coming to the conclusion that the US had no justification to invade Iraq.

"Not my son . . . Let someone else's son be a hero," was the initial reaction of his mother, Carolyn Ho, upon hearing of her son's decision, knowing the violent reactions he would receive from the public. Serene and composed as he faced accusations of being a "coward," Watada does not rank among the 8,000 deserters who silently left their duties in Iraq. By taking his objection to the public sphere, Watada is waging his own war against the war, one that has resulted in threats on his life and endangered his family's safety. In February, Watada's case ended in mistrial, and the US military has re-filed its charges against him; he will begin a second round of court hearings in May.

CHINA PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

Fifty-one year old Yang Wu and his wife Ping climbed daily over a ten-meter pit to enter their "nail house" in Chongqing, China – a house sticking out like a lone nail in a sea of excavated rubble. The house has been seared into the minds of millions of Chinese as a symbol of defiance against developers who had removed thousands of residents from their property – sometimes by armed force – to clear the way for condos and shopping centers.

With internet bloggers and local media taking the nation by storm with Wu's story, the Chinese government – with the world watching and the 2008 Olympics fast approaching – was forced to back down and listen to the couple's demands.

Although the house was torn down in March after the couple accepted a handsome property settlement, the "nail house" has become a testament to the power of independent media and of ordinary citizens in China.





The Quiet Awakening

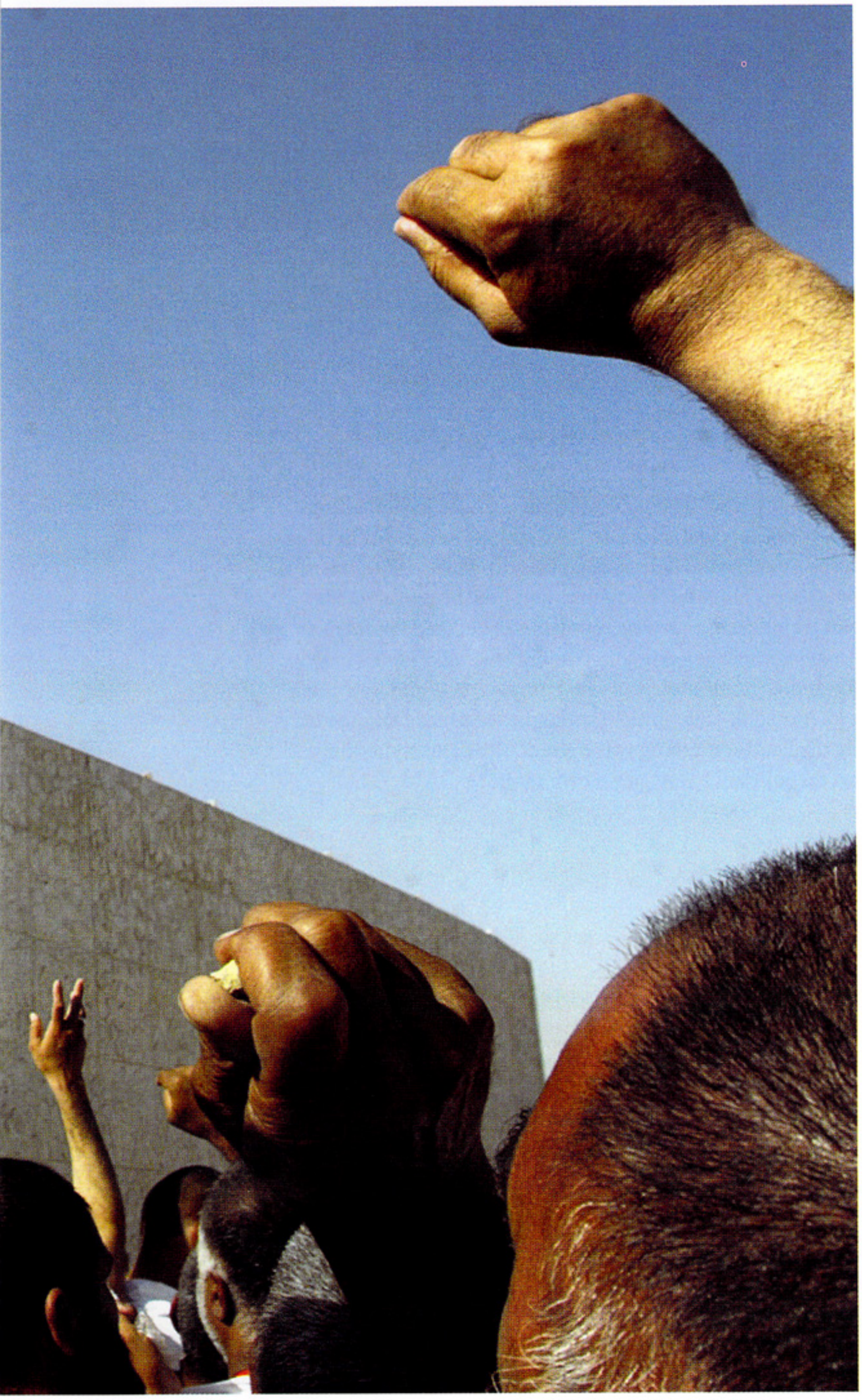
It's the quiet religion that has grown to become the fourth-largest faith in North America and much of the Western world. With no crusades or jihads, nor even belief in a Creator, Buddhism has flourished in the West largely unnoticed over the last 100 years.

Always a dominant religion in Asia, the powerful appeal of Buddhism resides in its lack of dogmatism, its flexibility. While Christianity and Islam have gained converts through aggressive proselytizing and militant dogma, Buddhism has gained ground because of its relaxed and undemanding stance. With the charismatic Dalai Lama as one of its key spokespeople, Buddhism today has become nearly synonymous with inner peace.

Because Buddhism does not require practitioners to renounce other religions, many Buddhists in the West have adopted a multi-faith identity, resulting in such terms such as "JuBu" (Jewish-Buddhist) and "Christian Buddhists" who meditate daily and go to Sunday Mass. Many see it as a kind of open-source faith that can be learned and customized to suit one's needs, be it to relieve suffering for the dying or to promote simplicity for high-powered businessmen.

With more than 450 million believers worldwide and no central leadership, Buddhism continues to thrive. Passion and intransigence may be the key to effecting great changes in the world, yet Buddhism is slowly awakening us to the power of compassion and tolerance.


NEWSCOM



☐ *being*

☐ *nothingness*

"What is art?" I asked my grandfather while he was still alive, and he began telling me about his wedding day, how beautiful his wife was, my grandmother, his pupil at art school in Cairo, Egypt, the woman who had married this orphaned artist, this survivor of genocide, her teacher, her cubist-impressionist, and how beautiful the day was, the room adorned with loving faces, his wife, a portrait of dedication and faith, the alter, Christian and ornate, her mother and father and brother and sisters and cousins all behind her with folded hands and faces, such lovely faces, and how then, just then, at that moment he turned in bliss and glory and pride towards his side of the church, and something died and something was born that day and something was answered when he saw the miles of empty pews behind him.

– *Alan Semerdjian*

This is how is all ends



ED KASHI/CORBIS

don't say "wait a minute"
when your time comes

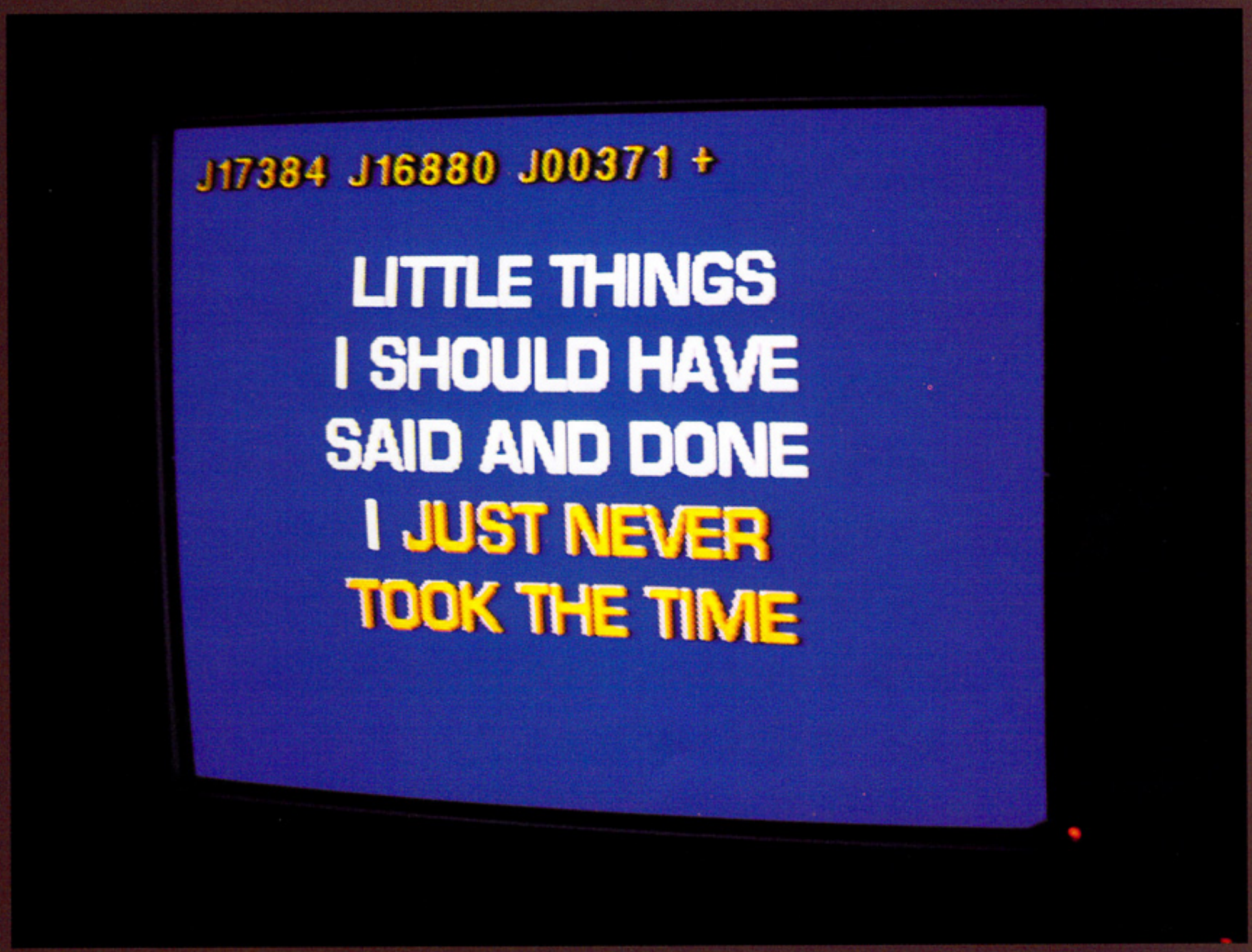


SALLY PETERSON

Winter was wild this year. The sky was full of snow and wind; the trees in front of the cafe looked like stubbly old men in the white air; it was cold in the narrow room overlooking the Struma River that flowed tiredly, grumbling to its rocks. Gogo slept by her side, bent double, his skin whiter than the January sky. She lived in the café, in the back room overlooking the river. She liked the guys who serviced the big truck which collected the garbage on Main Street. They drank her coffee, their black eyes pushing under her old blue apron. "I'll buy you a silver ring," the shortest of them said once, but Viah knew he didn't have money; none of the guys had money. Yet they

looked at her as if they could buy her the sky, and the small park covered with dirty snow. She had rented the café and had named it "Viah Café" after herself. It was the favorite haunt of the men who collected the garbage, the men from the slate quarry and from the slaughterhouse. They all brought their smells with them – slaughtered animals, gunpowder, occasionally garbage – and they brought their eyes, too.

She always had someone: the strongest one, the man who had slaughtered the most animals. Now the man who had killed the most barren cows slept by her side with his white skin that sparkled by her brown body. He held her in his



dreams. That man's name was Gogo, but the guys called him Blood. His nose had been broken several times.

In the afternoons, he stopped her in the café to sniff her blue apron, "You smell sweet," he said, but that could hardly be true. Cigarette smoke crept up to the ceiling and the room was thick with suspicious odors: of boots, wet coats, and the rest. The men watched him smell the collar of her apron and didn't dare to utter a sound, their eyes buying Viah every drop of the Struma River – from its source to the Aegean Sea. Whenever Gogo showed up in the café, were it at noon, at daybreak, or at 2 a.m., Viah went right away to that cold bed in the backroom, which was full of vodka and big demijohns of brandy. She loved

TIM BARBER

him till she left him perfectly mousy and powerless in his unbelievably white skin.
"I'll buy you a gold bracelet" he whispered choking, but Viah knew he was broke.
Blood gave her all his money and she bought cheap brandy for the men who drank it in the café. She preferred not to think of the bad brandy while she listened to his happy voice that lied to her about the bracelet. His obedient happy skin smiled at her with all its pores. Even at noon when the men who collected the garbage ordered French fries, Gogo waited for her in the backroom, glowing like an ember. She came in and stayed until his skin could no longer love her.
Several times the French fries turned into coals in the pan. The dustmen learned to



SALLY PETERSON

take chicken livers out of the fridge, then fried and ate them underdone as they listened to the sounds coming from Viah's backroom.
"Come with me to Italy," Gogo asked her once. He had made arrangements to go to Calabria – there were so many olive trees there; you picked olives all day and the Italians, who were frog-eaters as he had heard, paid you handsomely. But how could he go to Calabria when Viah waited for him in the café? He didn't get into fights any more, for if he got slashed he would have to go to the hospital, and that would mean he'd lose a precious day with her.
"Won't you start for Italy?" She asked him one day. "You'll miss the season of olives."

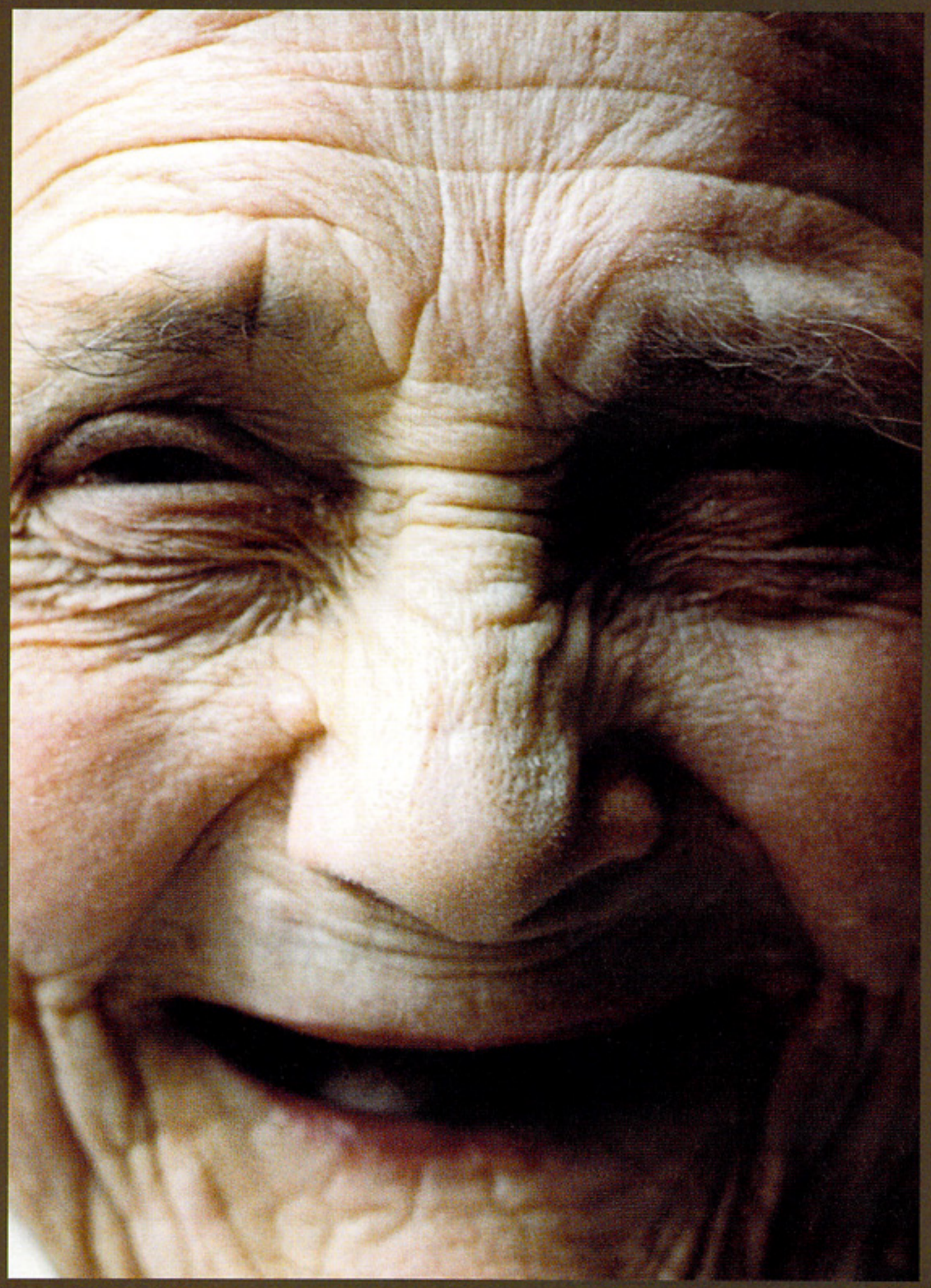
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my dead mother

separation anxiety

me

He simply could not go; she was like food for him. He'd be starving without her. Viah looked thoughtfully at his white skin, at his face that was a most ordinary stubbly face.
She had watched another white face before his, an almost beardless face of another man, who slept at exactly the same place in the bed by the wall. That was Radomir, the only son of the old man who made the wild fruit brandy.



"You have to leave for Calabria tomorrow," she urged Gogo. He woke up, said to her "come on" and she did, giving him what he wanted. Then she repeated, "You have to leave for Italy tomorrow."
She thought of the brandy in the big demijohns. Or rather, she thought of the old man who brought the brandy. He was Radomir's father. Radomir picked olives in Spain. In the evening he often called her on her mobile. He told her

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ANNET VAN DER VOORT

SCARE HOME *One last fright before you die*

by PATRIK HARPER

This cycle of life is such, that in this temporal existence of ours, we will periodically drift from varying degrees of dependence to independence; from our powerlessness in the cradle, to our powerlessness on our death-bed. In certain chapters of our life we cannot be scripting destiny, as it has already been laid out before us. Professor Peter Townsend, with his clarity of foresight and acumen of welfare policies conceded that some sections of the elderly population in their latter chapters of transition will inevitably be confronted by the reality of entering into institutional care. It therefore matters, what our destiny is, what our destination is. The idea of a "last refuge", suggests that the elderly will be seeking sanctuary, safety and shelter, to be afforded refuge in their time of increasing dependence and frailty. So we return to this question: "Are long-stay institutions for old people necessary in our society, and if so, what form should they take?"

Bureaucratically speaking the political think-tanks of this age have grappled with this question and produced a whole raft of acts, bills and regulations to lay down in letter and word the blueprint for ethical care. What macro-level social policymakers disregard is the large-scale disparities between the official, well-crafted rhetoric and the reality of the rock face. A rock face, which upon closer examination, has not only begun to crack, but to crack at such a speed as to cause serious alarm. We should no longer be preoccupied, in an idealistic sense, with the question of what "form" institutions for the elderly should come in, but more pertinently, focus on what "form" they cannot take. The goal of creating sound institutional environments for the elderly is not a heaven-mimicking project of social engineering, but a realistic act of curbing in the evident ills that cause immense havoc within the care sector. The thrust of my main argument arises from the blatant incompatibility of an aggressive capitalist accumulation logic married together with the whimsical drivel of UK's Care Standards Act 2000.

This Act sets out the "national minimum standards" for care providers, which in itself already reinforces the notion that the care sector is not interested in pursuing excellence, but is happy merely to be guided to the place where the fence is the lowest. A regulatory fence which is held forcibly low to allow for the existence of exploitative venture capitalist to privatize the sphere of care for financial profit and at the expense of a "higher standard" of care. We have managed to weasel away from the pressing urgency to increase the quality of care for the elderly by entering into a discourse that is euphemistically supporting an attitude of "getting away" with the least amount of effort and input, while expecting the financial output to remain constant if not increasing. In practical terms this ethos is manifest in staffing levels, whereby homes are primarily concerned with employing the minimum numbers of staff to cope with the largest possible number of residents; the care is no longer a consideration, just the immediate meeting of a "minimum standard" through humane ratios of staff to residents.

For the "last refuge" really to be the last refuge, we need to return to the rock face with our binoculars in hand to examine the micro-level considerations that so often get overlooked. Having worked in a residential care home for the past year, I'm in the position to provide insight into the mechanics of how these organisations function. People enter the sector with limited qualifications in this field, training opportunities are limited, induction periods are cut short, wages are at minimum levels, expectancy to work beyond working time regulations is high, understaffing is chronic, inspections sporadic and incomprehensive and staff turnover is phenomenally high. And we call it the "care" sector. How ironic. A satanic mill springs to mind. Comparatively speaking, following social democratic welfare models, you could not care for the elderly without any qualifications or experience; in England, you need neither. Paying care workers the minimum wage sends out one clear message: the elderly don't matter, our respect for them can be minimal. The value of caring for a human being can be equated with the value of cleaning a toilet or stacking a supermarket shelf.

Hankering after social justice within the care sector is critical now. We are moving into a period of history where populations are characterised by an ever increasing ageing cohort who will presumably one day have to rely upon one type of care or another; this ageing trend is attested by all recent demographic data from a variety of sources. We need to prepare the care sector with ethical foresight to be able to accommodate the inevitable influx of newcomers. Do we want to be responsible for treating our elderly with neglect and contempt, a silent sector of society who can be afforded the minimum of care because economic logic dictates so?

In the long run, it's our own graves that we are digging, for we also age. For death befalls every man. It's short-sightedness to disregard the future for the sake of the present. This is a call for those in power to re-introduce respect into society, respect at all levels. In the murky world of politics, where divided interests abound, it would take a selfless man of courage to stand up for those who are oppressed and begin the process of levelling social inequality. If stuck in the realm of "minimum standards" and doing just enough to be legally acceptable, then we might as well drop the label "care home" and introduce something closer to the truth, "scare home" – one last fright before you die.

Care without compassion is dead. The whole care sector needs reinventing from a system of exploitation to a system that cannot be corrupted by mismanagement or continually bowing to economic demands. Peter Townsend saw how the infirm went into the old workhouses, were stopped from going out, sat around, deteriorated and were there solemnly in solitude in amongst a faceless crowd to eek out their remaining existence. This is still the case, largely due to our reluctance to raise the par of excellence. We may regret creating a legacy of careless care, because our very own destination could be the last refuge.

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he counted the days that separated him from her and her narrow room. He was the brandy man. His father brewed the brandy, allegedly out of plums – but what plums could anyone brag about, for God's sake, when the trees in his orchard had withered long time ago? The old man put various things into the brandy, simmered it gently for hours, mixed sloes, haws and damsons, and perhaps he cursed it a lot, for his concoction tasted like death. The geezer moved quietly like a grass snake; he crawled up and down the hills of Barren Ridge for miles and miles to find a damson tree. The sun had baked his skin, winds from Greece scorched him and rains from Macedonia drenched him. He dragged an enormous sack into which he thrust wild pears, damsons, rose-hips for his brandy thinking how he'd bring it to Viah. He came early in the day, twice a week, silent like soot, and she recognized him by the smell of wild fruits and berries. She liked that smell.

She said she liked the old man's brown woolen jacket in which he dressed himself up for her. Viah didn't mind that he had tried to kill the odor of rotten pears by pouring a bucketful of cheap cologne over his face and hands.

She kissed him gently. She did not leave him alone until his thin face appeared silver with happiness; in fact, his face glowed white on account of his toothy smile. Viah kissed him ignoring the brand new shirt he had put on especially for her. She did not think about the enormous demijohns of brandy he made out of cornels and haws. She admired him. She truly respected him. He did so well for his age.

Afterwards, she gently took him out of the narrow room and asked him to get into his old boneshaker. There the old man slept, his head propped against the rusty steering wheel, his woolen jacket thrown over his shoulders to keep him warm. Viah always wrapped him up, left a bottle of wild brandy for him and thrust a loaf of bread into his paper bag.

Then the place next to wall in her bed was free for Gogo.

"You have to leave for Calabria, yes you have to. There are heaps of olives to pick there. The biggest olives in the world grow in Calabria. Go there quick, or other guys will pluck them all."

"You come with me and I'll start packing right away," Gogo said.

"Come off it," Viah answered absentmindedly, thinking of Radomir. He was soon to return from Spain. He called her in the dead of night to tell her that the raindrops were as big as walnuts, that the winds smelled of her and reached his bowels. He said it felt nasty in Spain because Viah was not there. The Spanish women were so short and squat. Night in, night out, Radomir told Viah he felt she was close to him. Viah listened to what he was going to do to her when he came back and smiled at the demijohns. He asked her if his father brought her wild berry brandy twice a week, as they had agreed, and wanted to know whether the jerks from the slaughterhouse annoyed her.

"Everything is OK," Viah answered.

"Yes, yes." She was waiting for him. She had even bought a new pillowcase for his pillow, which waited for him, too. He had to stay a little more in Spain, though.

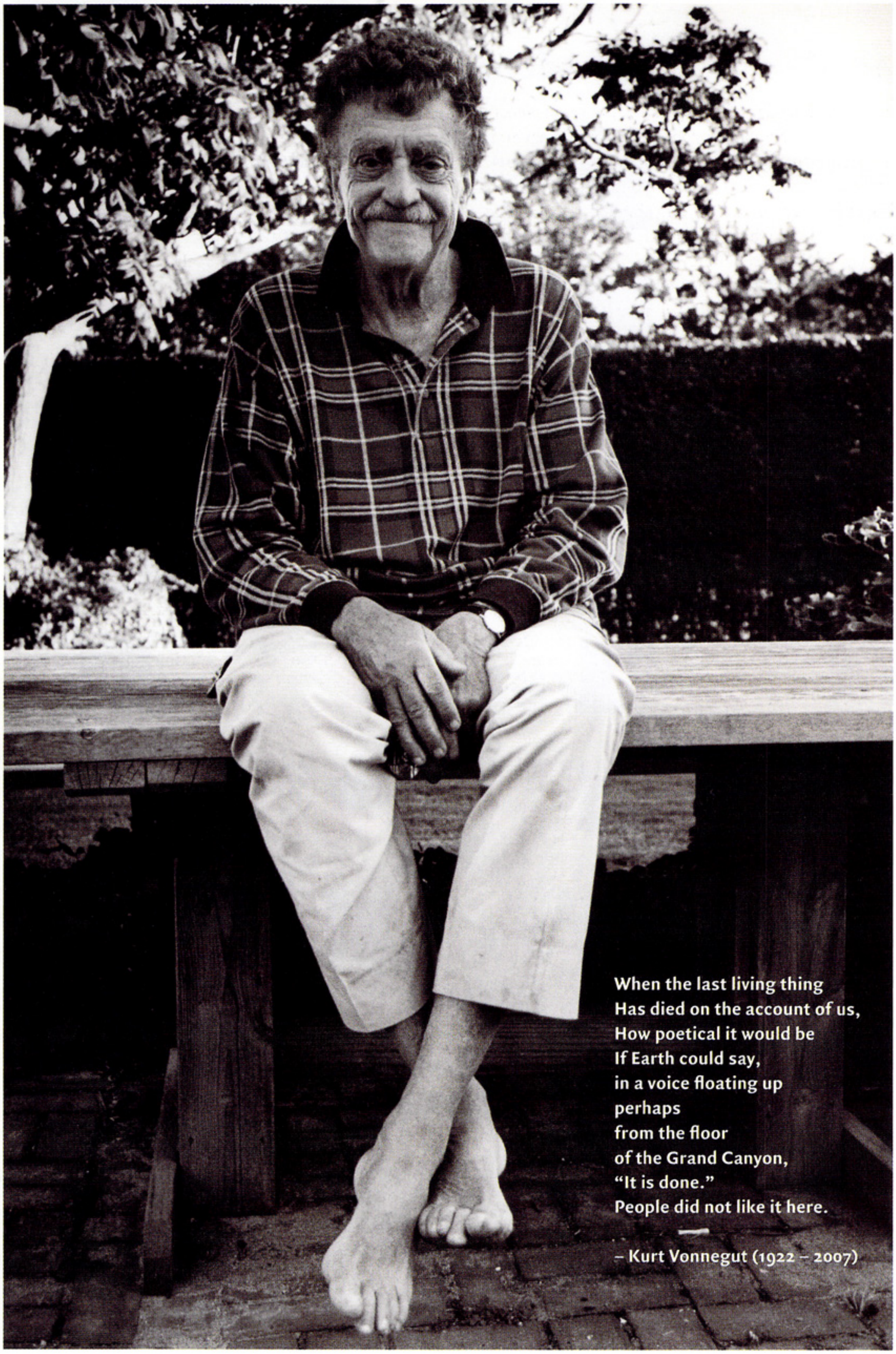
All the electrons in the air gathered in Radomir's voice and shouted that Viah was the greatest Spanish woman he knew, the tallest and the prettiest Spanish woman, although she was Bulgarian, every single inch of her. The girls he happened to meet in Spain were fools. Then he promised miserably he'd endure one more week in the Spanish rain, thinking of his new and clean pillowcase. All right, Viah answered him as she served the unshaven garbage collectors their brandies and sensed their eyes on her blouse. Stay in Spain one week more, she thought to herself.

"You have to leave for Italy," she told Gogo softly. He had gathered himself up and asked her to come on again, and she was about to, but then she suddenly thought she could not accommodate both Spain and Italy on the same clean pillowcase. She was sure that the season of the olives could not go on forever, she could not tell the old man every time that on the following Thursday they'd get into his boneshaker and spend the night on Barren Ridge under stars as tiny as dust.

She loved Radomir, she loved Gogo and she loved the old wild brandy man. Sometimes she thought she should leave the café and say good bye to the men who collected the garbage. She could rent another café, a little warm hole, far away from the Struma River, from the bearded snowy willows, the dark eyes that she liked better than any brandy under the sun. She'd sure find another cheap backwoods café. Maybe the whole country was a warm, cheap café; maybe she, too, was the only warm café for men who were to leave for Spain to pick olives or make houses for the Spanish women.

She knew she should go away but she loved Radomir, she loved Gogo, and she loved the old wild brandy man so much.

Zdravka Evtimova was born in Bulgaria and lives in Brussels, Belgium. Her short stories have appeared in various journals worldwide, including the US, Germany, France and Japan. She works as a literary translator.



When the last living thing
Has died on the account of us,
How poetical it would be
If Earth could say,
in a voice floating up
perhaps
from the floor
of the Grand Canyon,
"It is done."
People did not like it here.

– Kurt Vonnegut (1922 – 2007)

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CORBIS

"It'll be alright, honey." "There's no need to worry." "Don't cry." "I'm not going to die."

My mother told me that last one when I was six years old and suddenly gripped the reality that we all must die. "Don't worry, honey," my mother said, "I'm not going to die."

Far from reassuring me, as I'm sure my mother intended, my fears only increased. Now I knew two things: we were all going to die, and I could no longer trust my mother.

Now that I have two children of my own, I don't sugar-coat their fears, nor do I obfuscate the facts of life when they are presented with some grim sliver of reality.

When they bring the topic up, I explain, "I will die someday. I don't know when, but I hope it's a long time from now." My five-year-old daughter wants to know who will take care of her if I die.

"Your father," I say.

"What if he dies?"

After we go through the numerous family members who would step up to take care of her – grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins – she wants to know, if her whole family dies, can she live with her best friend Irene? A wide smile appears over her face at the thought.

– *Elizabeth Field*


CASH & REDEMPTION
HYAKUMI


Tropicana
Poland Spring
SAMS CLUB

How many times can a corporation betray us before we question its right to exist?

Altria

Whatever its name, tobacco giant Philip "Altria" Morris deliberately deceived the public for decades, both directly and through front groups, about the deadly consequences of smoking.

MERCK

Kept Vioxx on the market despite having evidence that the hugely profitable arthritis drug posed major heart attack risks.

ExxonMobil

Heavily funded fake grassroots organizations and dubious experts to stall action on climate change, possibly jeopardizing all of humanity.

DOW

Refuses to compensate the families of the 20,000 killed and 100,000 injured by toxic gases leaked from an Indian chemical factory operated by Union Carbide, a wholly owned Dow subsidiary.

MONSANTO

Found guilty by the courts of "conduct so outrageous in character and extreme in degree as to go beyond all possible bounds of decency" for polluting an Alabama town with toxic PCBs.

Six days before his death in 1864, Abraham Lincoln wrote a letter expressing his profound fear that the "enthronement of corporations" would destroy his young nation. Corporate power has been in ascendancy ever since. In the last couple of decades alone, merger after merger has produced conglomerates so huge that they rival many of the nations of the world in wealth and power. Unlike the leadership of nations, however, these corporations are unelected and unaccountable.

Corporations like the five on the left have openly, brazenly, unrepentantly committed crimes and betrayed the public trust. And these are just a few of the misdeeds of just a few of the world's corporate criminals. But these rootless giants answer to no one, whether they pollute us, gag us, bankrupt us, or outright kill us.

This cannot stand. Civil society must take back control. Help us put a human thumbprint back on the corporate charter.

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